

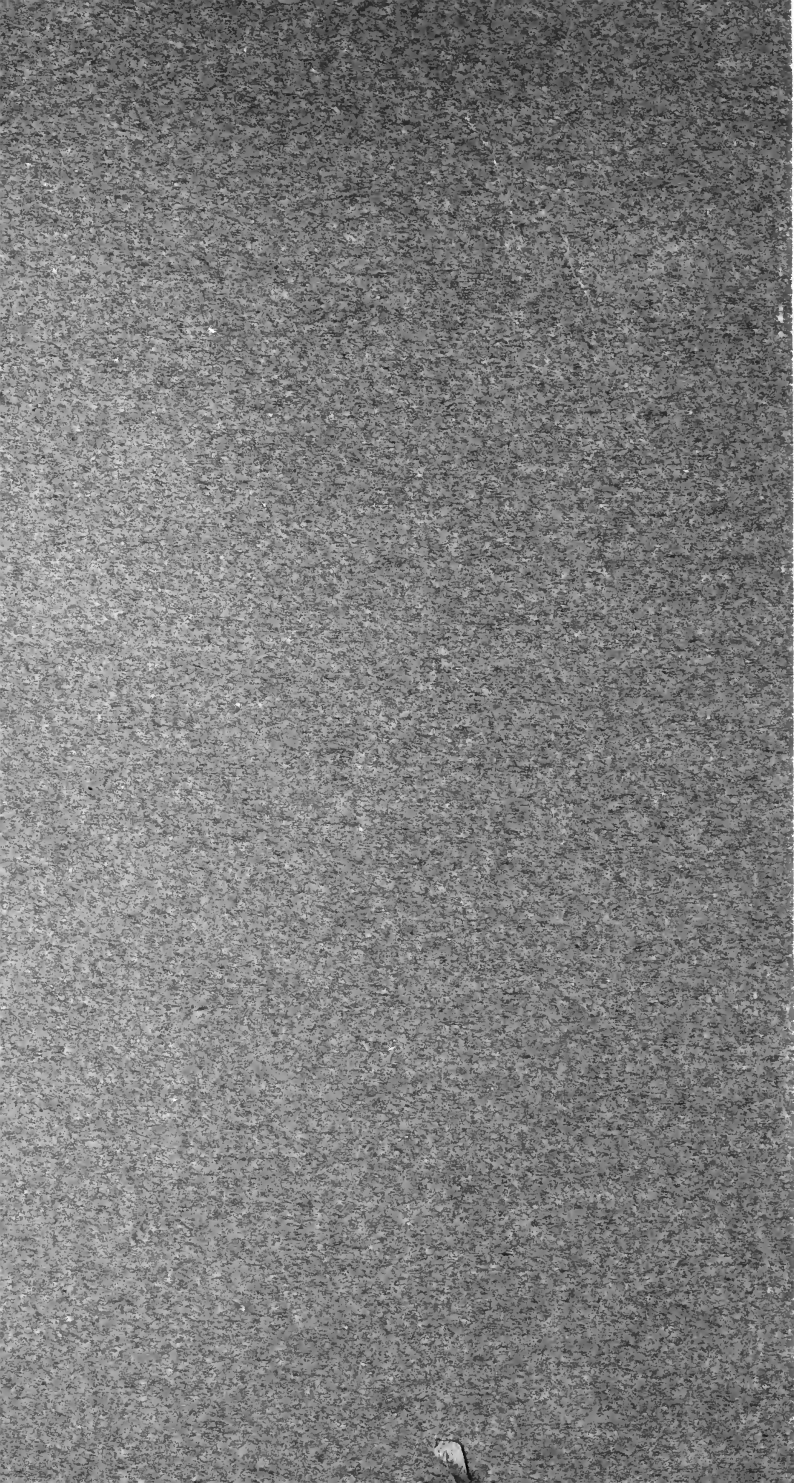
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



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Dimond, William
The doubtful son

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~~THE~~ THE
DOUBTFUL SON,

OR

Secrets of a Palace;

A PLAY,

IN FIVE ACTS,

AS ACTED AT THE

THEATRE ROYAL IN THE HAY-MARKET,

WITH GENERAL APPLAUSE.

BY WILLIAM DIMOND, ESQ.

AUTHOR OF "THE FOUNDLING OF THE FOREST"—"HERO
OF THE NORTH"—"ADRIAN AND ORRILA," &c.

[First edition.]

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR W. H. WYATT, PICKET STREET,
TEMPLE-BAR;

BY B. McMILLAN, BOW STREET, COVENT GARDEN.

1810.

[Price Two Shillings and Sixpence.]

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PREFACE

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During a period of severe indisposition, when occupation and pleasure were equally removed from my pursuit, I bore the weight of some heavy hours, by reviewing the half-faded impressions of an earlier age, and arranging them into a dramatic shape.

As I have never written intentionally for the public, and am altogether careless of a literary reputation, my Play, as soon as finished, was cast aside as an object of no further regard, and without any idea of its future performance upon the stage. Accident, some time afterwards, placed in my hand a French Comedy by BEAUMARCHAIS, in which I discovered the identical circumstances I had adopted from Homer, to have been already appropriated with success to a Dramatic purpose.

The appropriation of a Parisian Portent has frequently been found not an equivocal guide to the taste and temper of English Audiences. However, I was induced by this discovery to re-consider my own Drama with a more favourable attention. Upon a comparison of the two Plays with each other, I inclined to an opinion, that BEAUMARCHAIS had managed the opening of his plot with more adroitness than I had employed. Under this impression, I cancelled the greater portion of the two first Acts in my own Drama, and introduced as much as possible, both of the action and expression of the French Author in their room.

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The character of *Borrachio*, is of my original invention, and the entire agency of the three latter Acts is also a creation of my fancy, with only one trivial reference either to Spanish or French design.—I have modelled the progress of the Plot according to classical rules, and the Unities of Time and Place have been strictly preserved.

The popularity which the '*Doubtful Son*' has obtained in representation, leaves me no motive for regret that I suffered him to be drawn from my portfolio to the Stage. Each Theatrical Critic, whose opinion possesses any esteem in Society, has individually published his commendation of the Play; I should therefore offer but an ill-requital to the world for so particular a fit of its good-nature towards me, were I in my single person, to affect any diffidence regarding the merits of the Piece. Sincerely speaking, I believe it to be a good Play; but this declaration springs from my wish to be ingenuous, and not from my vanity. The knowledge that I have succeeded, and the belief that I have deserved success, communicate no throb of exultation to my heart; while on the contrary, had my Drama been proved the vilest of the vile, and hooted by indignant Auditors from off the Stage, I should have abated no single particle from my stock of self-esteem. The Family of Blockheads, is too numerous and too creditably established in Society, to render an acknowledgment of their relationship a disgrace to any man.

I still write, because the effort of composition occasionally amuses my mind; and I continue to publish, because the world appears to receive my works with partiality. But if I know my own heart, the feverish pride of *authorship*—its insatiate appetency for applause—its agonizing sensitiveness under reproof—*now* influences no portion of my feelings.

Once, perhaps, I felt differently.—I became an Au-

thor at *fifteen*, and the eagerness of hopes and wishes is inseparable from the dawn of youth. I listened to flattery when I could not distinguish its tones from the voice of truth; and I was rendered vain before I had been told that vanity was a fault. A few fleeting years may not have added much to my experience, but they have stolen away nearly all of my enthusiasm, and I have long since learned to estimate the usual objects of this world's ambition, even as their hollowness and insincerity deserve. The pride of *literary* distinction appears to me, beyond all others, vain and futile. What is that *fame*, of which the Poet's heart creates its visionary mistress? a fugitive, uncertain phantom, that tempts but still eludes his living embrace, never to be yielded as a bride, till Fate has chilled his human fires, and the consciousness of his spirit has withdrawn to other worlds. Peace is the only real good; and national monuments, shaded by the laurel and the bay, yield no dearer resting-place to him who fain would sleep for ever, than a turf-grave clasped by osiers.

If I were to offer an *individual* tribute to the merits of each Performer whose name appears affixed to my *Dramatis Personæ*, I should swell a preface into a volume. Within my own recollection of the Stage, no new Play has been sustained by a happier combination of talent. Perhaps, I ought to particularize Mr. SOWERBY, from the circumstance of his being introduced by me upon this occasion to a London Audience, as a fresh candidate for its favour, and consequently less generally known and appreciated by the Town. His performance of *Malvogli*, one of the most difficult and intricate characters of the Modern Stage, in my opinion, has indicated a strong original genius under the guidance of an excellent judgment, from the future developement of which, the most valuable results may be expected.

WILLIAM DIMOND.

Temple, }
July 13, 1810. }

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Alfonso (<i>Marquis of Lerida</i>)	Mr. C. KEMBLE.
Leon (<i>his reputed Son</i>)	Mr. ABBOTT.
Malvogli (<i>a Portuguese</i>)	Mr. SOWERBY.
Borrachio	Mr. FARLEY.
Fabuletto	Mr. BANNISTER.
Vasquez	Mr. MENAGE.
Notary	Mr. CARR.
Victoria of Lerida	Mrs. GLOVER.
Rosaviva	Miss H. KELLY.
Floribel	Mrs. GIBBS.

Notaries—Alguazils—Domestics, &c.

SCENE—The Palace of Lerida, in Madrid.

*TIME—From Nine in the Morning until the same
Hour at Night.*

THE
DOUBTFUL SON,

§c. §c.

Act I.

SCENE—*A Hall in the Palace of Lerida ; at the extremity of which a large double Staircase ascends to different Galleries. A plaintive Air is skilfully played upon the Flute behind the Scenes. FLORIBEL opens a Door in the Gallery, and descends the Staircase from the left, carrying a Mourning Veil. She listens with an air of melancholy attention to the Strain, and advances to the front of the Stage as it ceases.*

Flor. Leon ! dear unconscious Leon ! you breathe upon the flute sounds of peace, and greet the return of your natal morning with a delighted spirit.—Yes ; *you* rejoice — *you* alone — the anniversary of whose fatal birth devotes this palace to eternal sadness ! (*The Air is resumed, dying away in distance*). He wanders further thro' the gardens—Heigho ! 'tis scarce nine o'clock yet, and already I feel so weary—

FABULETTO *enters cautiously at a Side Door.*

Fab. Hist ! Floribel—hist !

Flor. Ah ! Fabuletto !—You always approach me on the tiptoe of mystery ; like a lover rather than a husband.

Fab. Hist !—is he risen yet ?

Flor. Who ?

Fab. Why, Signor Devil—Don Wolf in sheep's clothing—that villanous, execrable, infernal—

Flor. Portuguese—be silent, my good angry husband ; or if you must prate, let it be in a lower key—the man in question is in his chamber just above us, and if your complimentary epithets chance to reach his ear, our project will be marred for ever.

Fab. Earthquakes, fatal to his native Lisbon, pursue and overwhelm him !

Flor. Perfect heroic verse ! Prythee, good man, leave your bombast, and tell me the cause of this extraordinary passion.

Fab. The triumph of hypocrisy, and the distress of virtuous hearts ! The situation of the family becomes every day more terrible and alarming—harmony and confidence are banished from its bosom ; while, in their room, cold disgusts, sullen jealousies, and angry apprehensions, are substituted between the husband and the wife—between parents and their children—Within this last month the temper of the Marquis has become intolerable.

Flor. Truly, Fabuletto, your *own* temper has of late been none of the sweetest.

Fab. I know it, Floribel.—I have lived from infancy in the service of the Marquis—till now I have always been honoured by his confidence—a

kinder, nobler, true Castilian spirit, never could exist : how then can I preserve my patience, when I behold this honourable man entangled in the snares of a knave, yet am forbidden to relieve him from his danger ?

Flor. But what proofs have you that Signor Malvoli is indeed a knave ?

Fal. Are mystery and disguise the characteristics of an honest man ?—Nobody is acquainted with his origin, or his former situation in life. My unsuspecting master meets with him a destitute and friendless adventurer—he hears that he has been unfortunate, and he forgets to enquire whether he has not also been unworthy—the gates of the palace are thrown open to him, and from the very moment when this crafty insinuating Portuguese was first domesticated here, the unhappiness of his benefactors may be dated.—He has wormed himself into the confidence of every individual in the family, and employs his knowledge of their secrets for the destruction of each other.—You look incredulous, Floribel—Oh ! I perceive it—you are the dupe of this impostor equally with others.

Flor. No ; I have escaped the infection which seems to spread through the house ; but I grieve to tell you, Fabuletto, that my mistress is no less infatuated by the speciousness of this hypocrite than the Marquis himself : she has actually—I tremble while I speak it—confided to him that fatal secret, upon which the peace and honour of her whole life depends.

Fab. (starting). Eh !—how !—you do not, cannot mean the—

Flor. Yes, Fabuletto—*that* secret, which for twenty years we both have guarded more closely

than our lives, my indiscreet mistress has imparted to Malvoli—'tis true, she first exacted from him a solemn oath never to betray her confidence.

Fab. Madness and ruin!—his oath truly!—what reliance can be placed on the religion of a wretch whose morality is tainted to the core?—the Marchioness has undone herself—has she committed those papers to his keeping?—speak—

Flor. No—he was only suffered to peruse them in her presence—that confession in her own writing—and that terrible letter traced with the blood of a dying man, are both secured again within the secret drawer of my lady's jewel-casket.

Fab. Then it may not yet be too late to save her—assist me, my dear Floribel, to unmask this traitor.—Encounter him with his own arts; soothe, flatter, caress—in short, grant him whatever he requires.

Flor. That's rather extraordinary advice from a husband—however, mark me—my first step towards Malvoli's confidence, must be the appearance of having forfeited yours—hist—hist! I hear his foot upon the staircase—quick!—raise your voice, and appear to find fault with me, if you can.

Fab. O! I can easily contrive that—*(raises his tone)*—hark'ye, Signora! I must make you know and respect the authority of a husband; and if ever again you presume—

Flor. I defy your authority—you may be my husband, but you shall never be my tyrant.—

(Malvoli descends the stair from the left, and advances between them.)

Mal. How!—my worthy friends!—what is all this?—wrangling, accusing, and a female in tears!

Flor. (*affecting to cry*). Yes, Signor Malvoli—that monster has been threatening me.

Mal. Horrible!—Signor Fabuletto! did ever a man of honour oppress a being of the softer sex?

Fab. 'Sdeath! Signor Malvoli, what right have you to interfere?—There is no man of honour in the room, that I know of; and this being of the softer sex, happens to be my wife, a creature bound by law and religion to obey me.

Mal. Oh! you are too impetuous—come, refer your dispute to me—suffer me to be an umpire betwixt my friends.

Fab. If I ever accepted an arbitrator in domestic differences, my master's Portuguese Secretary would be the last I should approve.

Mal. Signor!—You grow scurrilous—you pay me too little respect.

Fab. Oh! no—you are mistaken—'tis impossible any honest man should pay Signor Malvoli too little respect.

[*He bows sarcastically, and exit.*

Mal. I am lost in astonishment—my fair Floribel, what has been the cause of this dispute?

Flor. (*still affecting tears*). He came here on purpose to abuse and ill treat me; but I'll bear it no longer—I'll have a separate maintenance before to-morrow, or run him in debt till he is forced to fly the country!

Mal. Think of it no more—a fleeting cloud had hovered between my confidence and you, but this removes it—

Flor. Umph!—is that all the comfort you can give me.

Mal. Patience! You shall find in me a powerful protector—'tis time for me to prove my friendship, and I shall begin by entrusting to your charge an important secret—but soft!—look that no person can overhear us—(*Floribel steals gently to observe*)—Now, if I could wheedle this weak creature to entrust me for a few minutes with that casket, where the important papers are concealed—

Flor. (returning). There's not a soul stirring—now then for the secret, Signor!

Mal. Floribel! serve your friend—your real friend—and a splendid destiny awaits you. I am to marry Rosaviva—the Marquis wills it so.

Flor. Indeed!

Mal. 'Tis a point irrevocably fixed; and if you, my dearest Floribel—you, who possess so much interest with Rosaviva, will but strive to dispose her affections to our wish—

Flor. Ah! Signor, but Don Leon, the Marquis's son, is in love with her.

Mal. Umph!—We shall cure him of the folly.

Flor. Well, but Signor, Rosaviva also loves—

Mal. Him?

Flor. Yes—tenderly, devotedly!

Mal. We may find a remedy for the lady's foible also.

Flor. So!—but then my lady—the Marchioness—

Mal. Her opinions may be modelled to our pleasure; or if otherwise, her opposition will be of trifling moment. As for the amorous Leon, he is destined to travel—and to travel long; and Fabuletto—the sage, experienced Fabuletto—shall

be the *Mentor* of our new *Telemachus*. (*Takes her hand*). And now, my excellent Floribel! to what more nearly regards yourself: beloved, regarded, possessing the esteem and confidence of all—you shall reign absolute mistress over our establishment. No husband then, no threats, no coarse commands, but gentle halcyon hours and blest transporting—

Flor. Ah! I see by your coaxing and flattering, that you really want my assistance.

Mal. To confess the truth, I do depend upon your friendship greatly. You were always a kind obliging creature, and this very morning, for instance, it is in your power to render me a signal service.

Flor. Indeed!

Mal. That is—I call it a signal service, only from the consequence the Marquis attaches to it—in itself it is the merest trifle—the Marquis is fancifully desirous of presenting to Rosaviva upon her marriage, a set of jewels precisely like those belonging to the Marchioness; and he wishes to do it by surprize.

Flor. (*fixing her eyes upon him*). Well, Signor!

Mal. 'Tis a singular idea, I confess; but 'twere best to humor the caprice—perhaps he may ask you for your lady's casket, just to compare them for an instant with his jeweller—

Flor. Umph!—this is indeed a *singular* idea.

Mal. O! he fancies them particularly beautiful. You may readily imagine, Floribel, the affair is perfectly indifferent to me.

[*The Marquis speaks from above.*]

Marq. Has Signor Malvoli left his chamber?

Mal. Hark! the Marquis is here. (*The Mar-*

quis descends from the right hand stairs). My noble patron!

Marq. Your faithful friend, Malvoli!—never address me by another title—I have been seeking you in your chamber.

Mal. I should have waited on your Excellency, but stopped in my way to apprize Floribel of your wishes respecting her lady's jewels.

Marq. I thank you for the recollection.—Floribel! fetch the casket hither.

Flor. (*pulls Malvoli by the sleeve*). Signor! recollect the papers are deposited—

Marq. Did you not hear me?

Flor. I shall obey your Excellency!—(*aside*) Fabuletto desired I would grant every thing—but I shall have an eye upon them! [*Exit.*

Marq. That woman has offended you, I fear—You look uneasy, my friend!

Mal. Ah! if the feature betray the feeling, trust me I have deeper cause for uneasiness than a woman's prattle.—Do I not behold my friend and benefactor sinking hourly under the effects of secret melancholy!

Marq. Malvoli!—you are right—I am indeed the victim of a cruel slow disease, that enervates my mind, and subdues my body—refuses to destroy the sufferer quite, and yet admits no hope of cure!

Mal. You resign yourself to despondence too easily—may not the Marchioness—

Marq. Her very name is a mortal sickness to my soul!

Mal. Let me then observe—your son—

Marq. (*furiously*). Who?—my son?—my son! ha! ha! ha!—no, no—I have an heir, but no son.

Mal. Compose yourself, I beseech you, my dear Lord!—it is not from mere conjecture that a judgment so terrible should decisively be formed.

Marq. Conjecture! Ah! I am but too certain of my dishonour. Mark me, Malvoli—at an age of thoughtlessness and passion, when our sight reigns despotic over our other senses, I beheld and loved Victoria—at a father's command she yielded me her hand; but, alas! her heart was not included in the gift. Even at the altar, a cold reluctance hung upon her vows, and chilled the ardor of my bliss. Six little months of wedlock had scarcely moderated in the husband the transports of a lover, when my sovereign appointed me to the government of Mexico—Oh! with what doating tenderness I pressed Victoria to my arms, and breath'd upon her lips a thousand fond adieus!—Still, to the last, insensible and cold, she merely thanked my love, prayed the kind saints to keep me in their charge, and saw me part without one natural tear—one heartfelt sigh!

Mal. (pointedly). Leon then was born subsequent to your departure?

Marq. Aye! born, where and how?—In infamous concealment, and with disgraceful mystery. Abandoning her palace and her retinue, without the knowledge of a single relative or friend, the humble Marchioness commenced a journey in the depth of winter; and in a wretched hovel at the foot of the Pyrenees, with only two domestics to attest its birth, an heir to the noble House of Lerida met the light.

Mal. Those domestics were—

Marq. Garcia, an old chamberlain, now no more, and Floribel, the wife of Fabuletto.—The

Marchioness, mysterious and inexplicable to the world, for five successive years detained her infant from its natural claims, in foreign travel and the society of strangers. The clamours of my kindred reached me often; but still the letters of Victoria, professing constant love, and pleading ill health as the cause of her continued absence, lulled my suspicions in their birth. I parted with doubt and fear—to think of them no more; and when, after sixteen years of absence and impatient hope, I reach'd my sigh'd-for home once more—O, dupe! O, credulous ideot that I was!—confidence and love possessed my bosom—I embraced Victoria as my constant wife, and blessed in Leon the fancied copy of my glorious sires!

Mal. And wherefore should you now regard them differently?

Marq. Listen to me, friend! About a twelve-month after my return, Garcia, one of the two domestics who had attended the Marchioness on her journey, was suddenly stricken by the hand of death: in his expiring moments he prayed to speak with me alone. The last agony was on him when I reached his chamber. “Forgive your servant—” cried the dying man, “your ear has been abused with falsehood—Leon is no child of yours—he is the son of the Marchioness by a low-born page.”—Horror and amazement overcame my faculties, and I fell insensible. Ere I recovered, the wretched Garcia had ceased to breathe—all evidence of my disgrace had perished with him—but from that fatal hour his words have murmur’d in my ear incessantly. Conceive, Malvoli—imagine my despair!—tormented by the dread, that all the glories of my ancient house—my name, my office, and my

wide domains, will become the patrimony of an alien to my blood—the child of vice and shame—my dishonour and my curse—who, to increase my distraction, comes daily to insult my ear with dutiful professions and the name of *Father*!

Mal. Alas! my Lord, compassionate the frailty of human nature—recollect the lovely Rosaviva, whom you have introduced to the Marchioness and to the world as your *ward*, but who, in fact, may claim a tenderer tie—

Marq. (interrupting). Yes, my friend! That Rosaviva shall become the avenger of her father!

Enter FLORIBEL, with the Casket.

Flor. Here is the casket, my Lord!—but I must replace it before my Lady rises.

Marq. (taking the Casket). Floribel—give orders that no person enter this room unless I ring.

Flor. (aside to Malvoli). Recollect, Signor!—you have sworn—

Mal. (in a low voice). Never to acquaint the Marquis where he may find certain documents—Enough!

Marq. Floribel!—leave us.

Flor. I am gone, my Lord—(aside)—Fabuletto shall know of this, however. [Exit.

(The Marquis opens the Casket, and sighing deeply, draws forth a Bracelet.)

Marq. Ah! 'tis here—my picture—painted in the days of confidence and bliss—days for ever past! Come, fatal bracelet! once pledge of love—now, instrument of vengeance—welcome, welcome!

Mal. You alarm me!—what dreadful purpose is in your mind?

Marq. Do you not recollect in the Marchioness's chamber, a large painting, her own design, which generally is kept veiled?

Mal. Perfectly—the subject is the Parting of Hector and Andromache.

Marq. Aye! did no living resemblance of the warrior ever strike you?

Mal. Yes.—The features have often reminded me of Leon: indeed I once observed so to the Marchioness; but she seemed distressed at the remark—the effect of accident, no doubt.

Marq. No—of guilt—of deep and damning guilt. Frequently have I surprised her gazing on that picture, all drowned in tears, and uttering wild complaints.—In that warrior her adulterous eyes gloat on the father of her Leon.

Mal. Fancy! mere fancy!

Marq. I am convinced—(*takes another bracelet from his bosom*)—look upon this bracelet!—'tis fashioned precisely like the other; but the miniature which it contains, is copied from that warrior's face.—This likeness I shall substitute for my own.—If the false one remain silent, you must feel, Malvoli, I have proof enough—or in whatever manner she may mention it, an instant explanation must ensue, and drag the shameful secret of her crimes to light.

Mal. If your Excellency ask my advice, I must condemn the project altogether.—Honour revolts from such insidious means—if, indeed, any accident were to place certain facts before your eye, I might excuse your penetrating the mystery to its centre; but to spread a systematic snare—Oh! my Lord! what delicate mind would condescend to use expedients so derogatory to the dignity of man?

Marq. I cannot now retract—the touch-stone

is in my hand, and doubt distracts me worse than certainty!

Mal. (aside). Now to employ the secret spring!—nay, my Lord!—in honour's name!—(attempting to remove the Casket from him).

Marq. (passionately). Away! my resolution's fixt!

Mal. Nay, nay—You must not—shall not—(Malvoli, affecting to force the Casket from the Marquis, touches a secret spring, by which action the upper part of the Casket remains in his hands, and the false bottom with the Marquis).

Mal. Heavens!—the casket's broken!

Marq. No—'tis a secret drawer, which our struggle has discovered—here are papers!

Mal. Do not examine them!—I conjure you—for your honour, for your peace.

Marq. “If any accident,” said you, “were to place certain facts before you, I could excuse your penetrating the mystery.”—An accident does invite me, and I shall follow your advice!

Mal. Forbear! forbear!—

Marq. What is this?—a billet addressed to the Marchioness, and traced in bloody characters!!—Here too—a paper in her own writing—directed for Leon—“The Confession of”—Ah!!—(The Marquis, unable to support his agitation, throws himself into a chair, and casts his eye distractedly over the contents).

Mal. I would not be the accomplice of your crime for the wealth of worlds!—(Malvoli draws back while the Marquis peruses the first paper, and betrays by his gestures the triumph of his scheme.)

Marq. (rises furiously). Here! close up the rest—I'll keep but this—I want to know no more—(He thrusts the paper into his bosom).

Mal. For Heaven's sake resign that fatal paper—permit me—Ha! we are interrupted.

FABULETTO enters abruptly.

Marq. Presumptuous fellow!—what want you here?

Fab. I want! my Lord—Oh! I want to know what *you* want.—Did not your Lordship ring?

Marq. I ring!—inquisitive, prying knave!

Fab. Nay, my Lord, ask the jeweller, he heard the bell as well as I—

Marq. My jeweller!—what brings him hither?

Fab. He says, he comes about some fresh orders—and while—(*he eyes Malvoli severely, who in confusion attempts to conceal the Casket as much as possible*)—and while Signor Malvoli there, has my lady's jewel casket open in his hands, it might not be so much amiss if—

Marq. Insolent coxcomb! begone! and if half a word escape you—

Fab. Oh! no, my Lord!—I scorn to betray a secret by halves. (*He notices the divided Casket in Malvoli's hand sarcastically, and bowing ceremoniously, retires*).—

Marq. Quick! quick! hide the registers of hell from human eye for ever—I have the proof I sought—Ah! wherefore did I seek it—why did I find it—it distracts—it drives me mad—Oh! God!—read, read Malvoli.

Mal. (*rejects the Paper*). I become privy to such fatal secrets!—Heaven forbid!—restore it with the others, I entreat—(*A bell rings from above*). Hark! Floribel is coming!

Enter FLORIBEL, running, the MARQUIS turns away in agitation.

Flor. Quick! quick! the casket!—the Marchioness rings for me!

Mal. (returns it closed). You observe, Floribel, every thing in order.

Flor. (noticing their confusion). Yes, but the Marquis seems out of order—ah! Signor!

Mal. (quickly). What do you suspect?

Flor. Oh! nothing—my suspicions are all removed. *[Exit up the Staircase.*

Marq. (faintly). Malvoli, lend me your arm—lead me to the terrace—this air feels thick—I want to breathe more freely.

Mal. Collect yourself, my Lord!—Don Leon is here.

Enter LEON, who meets the MARQUIS as MALVOLI is supporting him out, and catches his hand eagerly.

Leon. My dear father! are you not well?

Marq. (snatches away his hand impetuously). Father!—leave to peasants and mechanics those plebeian appellations—men of rank use more elevated language—who ever uttered *father* at a court?—Whenever you address yourself to me, Signor, call me by my title—*(surveying him with a look of loathing)*—Your manner betrays a base extraction.

Leon (timidly). Dear Marquis, then—will you not permit me—

Marq. (with fury). Begone!—quit my presence!—*(Leon recoils a few paces in consternation—the Marquis averts his face, and waves his hand, as if sickening with disgust).* Come, Malvoli—come.

[He takes Malvoli's arm, and they exeunt together on one side; while the young man, silent and overwhelmed, retires upon the other.

Act II.

SCENE—*A superb Library, into which large Folding Doors conduct as from an Anti-room. The MARQUIS is discovered seated in the attitude of reading—suddenly he starts from his posture, and casts down the Volume with impetuosity.*

Marq. Books avail not! The philosophy of the dead cannot methodise the transports of a quick and exasperated spirit! The consciousness of my disgrace is every where!—the guilty tale is written on my floors!—a voice is in my walls that blabs it!—I see—hear—can think of nothing else! (*he paces to and fro in violent agitation*). Come, fatal paper!—once more let me read, and grow familiar with my shame. (*He draws the paper from his bosom, and reads with quickness*). “Rash and inconsiderate lover! the chastisement of our fatal and forbidden passion already has overtaken us.—War in a thousand terrible varieties besets *your* person—you have been wounded and a prisoner—the partner of your fault is your equal in wretchedness. This day I have given birth to a son, whose existence drowns me in tears, and condemns me to despair—he is your image and your life-blood!—Pray for your offspring—pray for its devoted mother:—my hand falters while I write—farewell!—Victoria.”—Oh! Victoria! false, degraded woman! (*he walks about in disorder*). The paper is without any date; but on the contrary side, I find an answer, which proves the seducer long

since dead.—(*He reads again*). “ Upon the field of battle, I pause to read the tidings of my love—a moment only is mine, and I employ it in blessings upon my Victoria and her child.—Should I fall in the action, a friend has sworn to deliver this, with other remembrances of our love.—The enemy advances, and our trumpet calls me to my post.—Adieu ! Adieu ! ”—And then—in *crimson* characters beneath—“ Mortally wounded, I open this once more to write you with my ebbing blood—a long—a last farewell !—remember.”—Beyond, the writing is illegible, and the paper stained with tears !—(*a short pause of emotion*).—I am torn !—distracted !—(*Throws himself into a chair*).

MALVOLI enters behind, and contemplates the MARQUIS with an air of satisfaction—then advances obsequiously.

Marq. (*perceiving him*). Ah ! dearest friend !—approach !—you find me overwhelmed—

Mal. Alarming ! indeed !—I feared to break upon your meditations.

Marq. (*pacing the chamber rapidly as he speaks*).—Woman ! woman ! light, fantastic, inconsiderate sex ! ye resign your destinies to the impulse of a moment, unmindful of the miseries ye entail upon yourselves, on us, and on posterity !—The morals of a female are a nation's safeguard ! the pride or shame of families is reflected from their conduct, and domestic bliss or bane depends upon their very reputation !

Mal. Hush ! compose yourself, my Lord ! your daughter, the lovely Rosaviva, approaches !

Enter ROSAVIVA, with a Bouquet in her hand.

Ros. Good morning to your Excellency! I was told you were engaged with business, and did not venture to intrude before.

Marq. Engaged upon your account my dear Rosaviva, my daughter! (*checks himself*) Ah! I love to call you by that name, for I have regarded you as such from your infancy.—Your mother, with her dying breath, confided you to my care, and I pledged myself to become as a father to you.—I shall perform my promise, by giving you a noble husband. Look around you and select—can you find no lover worthy of your choice?

Ros. (*timidly kissing his hand*).—Gratitude towards your Excellency possesses all my heart: the wish of my benefactor must ever be my law;—but since you condescend to consult me, let me answer, that my happiness is perfect without a change of situation.—Your son, when—(*hesitates*)—I mean, when Don Leon marries—for certainly he will marry at some time—perhaps may quit his parents' roof—ah! then, let the delightful task of softening your declining years devolve on me—yes! let me be indeed as a daughter to him who has proved himself more than a father to the orphan Rosaviva!

Marq. Charming, interesting girl!

Mal. In truth, my Lord, she merits an implicit confidence—lovely Rosaviva! embrace this generous, this affectionate protector—you are indebted to him for more than you believe.

Ros. Ah! my Lord—

Marq. (*embraces her*). Oh! let fastidious titles be reserved for cold indifference.—Look around you, Rosaviva—your future husband is now beneath this roof—

Ros. (with artless rapture). Ah! beneath this roof?

Mal. (seizing her hand). Yes, Donna Rosaviva—he—(Fabuletto abruptly flings open the folding-doors, and steps forward)—

Fab. My Lord! the Marchioness!

Mal. (dropping Rosaviva's hand). Curses on the officious knave.

Enter the MARCHIONESS.

March. My Lord—Signor Malvoli—a good morning to you both—My Rosaviva—

Ros. (flings herself upon her neck). Oh! dearest Madam, you find me so transported—the Marquis has just—(Malvoli motions Rosaviva mysteriously to silence. Fabuletto behind detects his gesture. She stops in confusion, and the Marchioness regards all parties with surprise).

March. (after a short pause). Fabuletto informed me your Excellency was much indisposed: I came hither in alarm, but find—

Marq. That the officious fool has again been guilty of an untruth.

Fab. Nay, if your Lordship pleases to recollect you appeared so disturbed when—

Marq. Silence! babbler!

March. (turning the discourse with affected indifference). In truth, my pretty Rosaviva, you transcend yourself this morning.—Who has decked you with those flowers, sweet girl?

Ros. Oh! I plucked them myself, Madam—is not this the Festival of St. Leon?—the birth-day of my dear—I mean—the birth-day of your son, Madam?

March. Lovely remembrancer! she omits nothing that can give us pleasure.—(The Marquis assumes a threatening gesture, but is with-held by Malvoli.—Fabuletto watches).

March. Fabuletto, since we are all met, acquaint my son that we will take our breakfast together here in the library.

Fab. Don Leon is here, Madam.

[*Leon is seen crossing the Anti-room.*]

Marq. (abruptly). I have writings to finish—let me have breakfast alone in my closet.

Ros. Yes, my dear Lord! I will bring it to you; but here is Leon—this is his birth-day.

March. Your Lordship had forgotten it was a festival—surely on such an occasion you will indulge us with your company.

Marq. (in a loud imperious tone). I have business, Madam, to arrange; business of importance, both to *your* family and to *mine*. (*She appears confused—he smiles ironically*) But keep your festival by all means—the days of rejoicing may not last for ever. Malvoli! you will find me in my closet! [Exit.

Leon. (advancing). My father shuns me! he constantly quits an apartment when I enter it—he treated me before this morning in so harsh a manner—

March. (catches his hand). Hush! I must not hear any reflection upon the conduct of the Marquis: if he appears to treat you with neglect, recollect, my dear boy, there may exist some latent grievances to irritate or disturb his mind—politics—state affairs—causes we cannot either penetrate or judge; do not therefore resent, or even appear to notice any casual petulancy in his manner: do not, my Leon—for your mother's sake do not.

Leon. Enough, Madam! I am unhappy, but you shall not find me disobedient.

March. Oh, Malvoli! he rends my very heart. (*Aside to him.*)

Mal. Courage! courage!

Ros. (cheerfully.) You regret your father's absence, Leon; so do we all; but recollecting this to be St. Leon's Festival, he charged me to present you with this bouquet. *(She advances smiling, and places it in his breast).*

Leon. (kissing her as she fastens it). He could not have dispensed his favours by any hand, that would have rendered them so very dear.

Ros. (disengaging herself). See, Madam, I cannot jest with him ever so little, but he must—

March. Ah! this is a day, my child, when we must not be too severe with him.

Ros. To punish him for it, insist upon his reading to us the Poem we were told he had written upon the occasion.

March. Come, my son, fetch your verses hither. I'll bring my working-case, and listen while you read. Fabuletto, hasten our breakfast in the interval. *(She passes through the Anti-room).*

Ros. Ah! I am glad your mother has commanded you—now, obstinate as you are, I shall be gratified in spite of you.

Leon. In spite of me?—when you desire it?—Ah! no Rosaviva, trust me, that is impossible.

[Exit rapidly.]

Mal. (eyeing Fabuletto, who remains behind). I thought it had been the Marchioness's order, that you should hasten breakfast.

Fab. I know my duty, Signor. *(aside).* Serpent! basilisk! you may dart your fiery glances at me, but I fear you not. *[Exit.]*

Mal. (insinuatingly). Well, lovely Rosaviva! now we are alone, have you guessed yet, who is the happy man the Marquis has destined for your husband?

Ros. Dear Signor! I am accustomed always to speak without restraint before you—on whom

can I but rest my thoughts? He says my intended husband is now beneath this roof. Ah! I perceive his goodness—it must be Leon.

Mal. Who?—Leon! the Marquis's son! your own brother!

Ros. My brother!

Mal. Recollect—I once told you in the presence of the Marquis, you were indebted to him for more than you believed! You owe him *life*!—your mother was a Mexican lady, who died in giving you birth! Motives of delicacy towards the Marchioness, induced his Excellency, on his return to Europe, to represent you merely as his *ward*. The secret still should have remained inviolate, but the imminence of your danger banishes reserve. I repeat it to you—the Marquis is your father, and Leon must henceforth address you only as a sister!

(*Rosaviva, who had listened with breathless interest to Malvoli, sinks back at last upon his arm, benumbed and motionless with horror.*)

Mal. Rosaviva! look up!—let not the offices of friendship destroy the precious object they were meant to save!—look up, sweet girl!

Ros. (*shuddering*). Leon, my brother!

Mal. Awake, my child!—arouse from a deceitful trance that may prove fatal to your peace for ever!

Ros. Ah! fatal to us both!

Mal. Hark! he returns—exert your fortitude, and strive to meet him as becomes your situation. Nature and Religion both prescribe your course. You must feel, Rosaviva, the importance of the secret I have revealed, and will not betray the confidence of a friend! [*Exit.*]

Ros. Wretched, deluded girl!—I wake from a delightful dream at once to terror and despair!

—Where have I wandered! a precipice is before me. Ah! how frightful! how tremendous! Heavens! he is my brother, and yet I have dared to—Ah! Nature sickens, and the blood creeps backward to my heart! (*Leon returns through the Anti-room with the Verses.*)

Leon. My Mother not yet returned, and the Signor gone! delightful opportunity! Oh! let me snatch at once the happiness it offers. Rosaviva, my life! my love! you long have known my passion, and this morning, your tender accents and bewitching smiles have so encouraged me—(*catches her hand.*)

Ros. (*mournfully.*) Ah! Leon!

Leon. Heavens! your streaming eyes, your quivering lips, declare some terrible affliction—you turn from me—you will not answer—ah! is it possible—then you no longer love me, while my passion for you—

Ros. Your passion! ah! never name it more!

Leon. How! the tenderest, fondest adoration—

Ros. (*wildly.*) Desist! desist! or I must fly!

Leon. Can the declaration of my love offend you?

Ros. Yes—it fills me with disgust—with horror!

Leon. Merciful powers! what then has occurred?—Signor Malvoli has just quitted you: I must learn from him the purport of your conversation.

Re-enter the MARCHIONESS, followed by FLORIBEL, carrying a working-case.

Ah! Madam! come to my relief: you find me in despair—Rosaviva no longer loves me.

Ros. Not love him, Madam? ah! the Mar-

quis yourself, and he, possess my whole affection.

March. My child, I do not doubt it; but wherefore this emotion?

Leon. Madam! you know, and have approved my ardent passion for her—

Ros. Bid him be silent, Madam! for heaven's sake, bid him be silent! (*She casts herself into the Marchioness's arms.*)

March. Rosaviva! I do not comprehend you: my astonishment equals his. She trembles in my arms—What can he have done to offend you thus?

Ros. Ah! he has not offended me—I esteem him like a brother—let him require of me no more.

Leon. You hear her. Inhuman girl, explain yourself. (*He seizes her hand, and forcibly kisses it.*)

Ros. (*struggling*). Leave me! leave me! cruel Leon! you will kill me!

FABULETTO enters through the Anti-room.

Fab. The breakfast will be here directly, Madam!

March. Let all be removed again!—You, Fabuletto, carry breakfast to the Marquis in his closet; and you, my Rosaviva, accompany me to my dressing-room. Compose yourselves, my dear children! I bear you both within my heart. Why will you agonize it thus without remorse? (*aside*) There is some mystery in this, I tremble to develope. Leon, you must not follow us—

Leon. Nay, let me at least conduct you through the gallery. (*The Marchioness passes off, supporting Rosaviva. Leon follows through the Anti-room. Fabuletto and Floribel stand on*

each side of the door, looking inquisitively at each other as they pass).

Flor. I don't know what to make of this—some devilish mischief is going forward, and I have a shrewd guess our notable Signor is at the bottom of it all—I must apprise my Lady of the casket adventure.

Fab. Not a word of the matter yet, wench! the time is not ripe for a counter project.

Flor. Well then I'll be silent to her; but I have a word of intelligence for you—(a bell rings)—Provoking! my Lady summons me already—I can't stay to give particulars, so take the outline in a breath—(she speaks as rapidly as possible)—Malvoli marries Rosaviva by the Marquis's desire—he will cure Leon of his passion—wean the young lady from her lover—make the Marchioness change her wishes on the subject—he drives you out of the house—procures a divorce between our master and mistress—disinherits the young man—becomes himself a grandee, and appoints your humble servant lady president of the new establishment!—There!—there's the news of the morning upon full gallop! [*Runs out.*]

Fab. *Multum in parvo!*—A precious snare this politic Signor has wound about the family; but thanks to my Ariadne wife, I have the clue of the labyrinth, and the monster shall be entangled in his own toils.

Re-enter LEON in great agitation.

Leon. Oh, heavens! how can I have merited this reverse.

Fab. Why—why, Don Leon!—what can be the matter?

Leon. Alas! Fabuletto! I am ignorant my-

self. Never did I behold Rosaviva so enchantingly kind and tender as when we met this morning—I left her but for an instant with Signor Malvoli, and returning, found her all agitation, and dissolved in tears—what could Malvoli possibly have said to her?

Fab. Ah! Sir, did I not fear your impetuous temper—

Leon. Nay, if circumspection alone be requisite, you may rely upon my prudence.—Speak, then, my good fellow—what do you think he told her?

Fab. That she must prepare to accept a Portuguese instead of a Spanish husband—in brief, that Malvoli himself is the man destined by the Marquis for his ward.

Leon. Malvoli marry Rosaviva! the traitor shall have my life first!

Fab. No; by this manœuvre, the traitor will not have your life, but he will take all that renders it of value—your mistress and your fortune.

Leon. Rage and indignation choak me!—best of friends!—worthy Fabuletto!—counsel—advise me—what have I to do?

Fab. Unravel the ænigma of the sphinx, or be devoured by it!—in plain prose, watch him closely but patiently, put a mask upon your nature, and dissemble with him.

Leon. I dissemble!—but yes—I will command my passion—Ah! he is coming here!—Now, Fabuletto, you shall have an instance of my prudence.—I will come coolly to an explanation with him!

Fab. Aye! coolly, Sir, for all is lost.

Leon. Do not fear me—you shall see.

Enter MALVOLI.

Leon. (*restraining his rage with difficulty*). Signor!—Signor Malvoli—a word with you!—the utmost frankness is indispensable—Rosaviva is in distress, and I must know the cause—this instant, Signor! what have you said to Rosaviva?

Fab. (*aside*). Oh! St. Lawrence and his gridiron! why this is the coolness of the dog-days!

Mal. (*with calm hauteur*). Who informed you, Sir, that I had spoken to her?—if Rosaviva be in distress, wherefore must I be catechised upon the cause?

Leon. No subterfuges, Signor! She was in the happiest of tempers when I left you together: on my return I found her in tears—her afflictions are my own, and you must give me satisfaction as to the cause of them, or satisfaction of a different nature.

Mal. Must? Young gentleman! by a less peremptory word, every reasonable concession might be expected from me, but I never yield to menaces.

Leon. (*furiously*). Nay, then, perfidious man! defend your life! (*They both draw—Faubletto rushes between*).

Fab. Hold! hold! Don Leon!—Signor Malvoli!—the son of your best friend—under his very roof—

Mal. I know what is due to friendship, and to myself. I shall explain all, but I want no witness—withdraw, and leave us together.

Leon. Go, worthy Faubletto; let us leave him no excuse.

Fab. I obey you, Sir! (*aside*) Now then to

alarm the Marquis, and bring him here to be a witness of their quarrel! [*Exit rapidly.*]

Leon. Now, Sir, defend your conduct either by your voice or by your sword—the option is your own, but I admit only of these alternatives.

Mal. Leon! a man of honour must not draw his sword upon the child of his benefactor! neither could he condescend to explain himself before a wretched menial, and gratify by a forced concession, the insolent curiosity of vulgar minds.

Leon. To the point, Signor!

Mal. Ah! how keenly will your honest but misguided mind reproach you hereafter, for this violence to your best of friends!

Leon. Subtle equivocator! to the point!

Mal. Well then—you rend an explanation from me (*affecting a dignified compassion*).—Leon! you love Rosaviva: your attachment has long been evident to me: anxious, tenderly anxious for your felicity, and vain enough to hope my little influence with the Marquis might tend to its promotion, I ventured to hint to him the fruits of my observation, and strove by every argument of friendship to dispose his mind in favour of your loves. Ah! forgive me, my dear young friend. I am going to afflict you—summon all your fortitude: for alas! I fear you will need it. I drew at length from the Marquis a terrible confession.—“Oh, my friend!” cried he, “I am not ignorant of my son’s attachment for Rosaviva; but their union is impossible—for learn, she whom you suppose my ward, is actually—my daughter!”

Leon. Merciful powers!—his daughter! dreadful, dreadful word! (*he covers his face with both hands*).

Mal. This is the secret, which a painful but

imperious duty compelled me to reveal to Rosaviva, and which has now—ah! for the eternal welfare of you both! my silence might have undone you. Now Leon! dear, impetuous, misjudging boy! will you draw upon me now?

Leon. (throws himself upon Malvoli's breast). Oh! never, never!

(*Fabuletto runs in through the Anti-room before the Marquis*).

Fab. This way, my Lord! here they are!

Marq. Folded in each other's arms! Have you lost your senses?

Fab. Faith, my Lord, I do feel a little bewildered.

Marq. Signor Malvoli! I request you to explain this to me.

Leon. No, my Lord! 'tis *I* who must explain—forgive me, Sir; I die with shame while I confess—(*Malvoli presses his finger to his lip*)—that—that on a frivolous, a ridiculous caprice, I forgot the dues of my own character, and madly offered insult to the worthiest of men; but his generous nature has already restored my reason, and pronounced my pardon: I was pouring forth the gratitude of a bursting soul when you surprised us.

Marq. The frankness of your confession could alone repress my anger. Go, Signor! teach your heart repentance for its follies, and henceforth reverence the virtues which you cannot imitate.

Mal. Oh! Marquis! all is forgiven—all forgotten.

Fab. (*aside*). The devil himself must juggle for him!

Marq. And you (*to Fabuletto*), officious tatler of conjectured evils! learn in future to gorge upon your odious calumnies in private, and equally

with your master to respect his friend—the assault of malignant spirits but more endears him to my heart, and I destine the hand of Rosaviva for his reward.

Mal. (aside to Leon). Leon! Dare I to hope this measure?

Leon. (wrings his hand with emotion). The blow is sudden, but I shall bear it as a man! Exalted character! you alone are worthy of the prize—my heart is breaking, but still it blesses you! Be yours eternally that happiness which I resign for ever! [*Rushes out.*]

Marq. (takes Malvoli by the hand). Come, my friend! let me present you to your intended bride! Fabuletto! communicate my pleasure to my household, and bid my notary instantly prepare a contract of marriage between my ward Rosaviva and the Signor Malvoli—the friend of her guardian and—his adopted son. [*Exit with Malvoli, frowning haughtily upon Fabuletto as he passes.*]

Fab. What do I hear! Husband to Rosaviva! his adopted son! Now in the name of all the—but no—this is a saint's day, and I won't swear. Ugh! ugh! the spleen will choak me! Why, Fortune herself turns pimp for this renegade, and uncovers her own eyes, that she may play mountebank tricks with the bandage, and hoodwink every creature in our family by turns! What would lay any other man sprawling in the mire, sets this fellow stouter upon his legs than before. Where does he come from? Who belongs to him? How does he receive his letters? Not a scrap comes for him by the post—no visible communication with any human being. Ah! he certainly springs up here direct from Pluto himself, and carries on a black-letter correspondence by some under-ground mail! But courage, Fa-

buletto!—Defy the fiend and his agent! Shall it be said that a scholar and a soldier—one who has studied the classics as a bare-foot servitor of Salamanca, and afterwards acquired a proficiency in the art-militaire under the inspiring touches of a corporal's rattan—above all, shall it be said, that a native upon his own ground, shrank from a contest with an intermeddling foreigner? No, no!—literature and chivalry forbid! Plot and counterplot shall be my watch-word.—My crafty foe has entrenched himself up to the ears, but if I cannot *storm* the fortification, at least I'll *sap*.

In the rough Parthian wars, of yore we're told,

The beaten soldier was esteem'd the bold;

Not he who *fought*, but he who *fled*, prevail'd,

And *wit* triumphant rose, where *valour* fail'd.

END OF ACT II.

Act III.

SCENE—*The Apartments of the MARCHIONESS*
 —*On one side is the Door of the Anti-room—*
Exactly opposite against the Wainscot hangs a
large Picture, representing the Parting of
Hector and Andromache—The MARCHIONESS
is discovered kneeling before the Picture.

March. Spirit of my love! my buried love!
 If happy souls in Heaven retain a consciousness of
 human cares, bend from thy joys, and for a mo-
 ment soothe the mourner's heart, who still
 embalms thy memory with her tears, and lives
 alone to sorrow, unaccepted penitence, and vain
 regret! Blessed one! be near unto her *now—now,*
in her utmost hour of need and peril!

Enter FLORIBEL from the Anti-room.

Flor. Lady! in tears? Will you indulge these
 sad remembrances for ever? Ah, that fatal
 picture!

March. (*rising, but still gazing on the Picture*).
 Floribel! do you recollect him when he passed
 the castle-gate for ever, and waved his helmet to
 me in a last adieu? Such was his parting look—
 so mournfully tender—so prophetic of his kind-
 less fate.

Flor. Lady! Lady! hide the portrait, or I must
 force you from the chamber.

March. (*drops the curtain before it, sinking*
with emotion). Farewell!

Flor. Nay, nay—compose your spirits. I have appointed Leon to attend you here—but tell me, Madam, what are your intentions by this interview?

March. What nature and my conscience dictate—Oh! Floribel, I can no longer bear about me this load of mystery and crime—it weighs me down—it presses on my brain!—

Flor. But you will not divulge to Leon the secret of his birth?

March. I must—or become an accessory to his death!—Heaven's slow but certain retribution has overtaken me—my steps are bewildered in the labyrinth I had planned for others—and only a desperate hazard can relieve me.

Flor. But first consider—

March. I can consider only, that I am a parent, and that my offspring's fate is vested in my hands.—Oh! can I bear to view my boy—dear innocent martyr for another's guilt! overwhelmed by the imagination of an unreal calamity—spirit-broken and despairing—the certain silent victim of defeated love.—Oh! can I behold him thus—and yet forbear to save him?

Flor. 'Tis surprising that the Marquis should never have hinted his relationship to Rosaviva before.

March. Ah, Floribel! the discovery of such noble delicacy in my husband, renders my own unworthiness more odious to my soul than ever.

—Generous, glorious being!—voluntarily has he denied himself for years, the proudest pleasure of a parent's heart, rather than violate the feelings of an ungrateful woman—whose only claim on his forbearance was the name of wife!—How have I repaid this unexampled tenderness?—by falsehood—cruel plots—and infamous

deception!—Quick! Floribel, find me a name to couple with my sin—call me traitress! monster! savage hypocrite!—you cannot rate me by a term so base as conscience tells me I deserve to bear.

Flor. For Heaven's sake! restrain these violent emotions.—Leon approaches—you must not meet him in this distraction.

March. I must—I will!

Flor. Disclose yourself to him then with caution, otherwise you will but undo yourself without preserving him:—recollect, Leon's nature is rash and precipitate as fire—who knows, but in the first transport of indignant honour, he may refuse to aid your plans, and proclaim at once the whole imposture to the Marquis.

March. Then both of us were lost indeed!—
O! Heavens!—on what shall I decide?

Flor. Ascertain his sentiments before you entrust him with the secret.—Hark! I hear him in the anti-room—promise me not to betray yourself too suddenly.

March. Well!—your advice shall be followed—I promise you! (*Floribel goes to the door, and introduces Leon.*)

Leon. (*with listless dejection.*) Madam, I attend you—it was your wish to converse with me in private.

March. Yes, my son!—Floribel, wait in the anti-room, and take care we are not intruded upon. [*Exit Floribel.*]

March. (*after a pause.*) You look dejected, my dear Leon!—I fear the recent discovery of Rosaviva's birth affects you deeply.

Leon. My nature has indeed received a fearful shock!

March. But time and reflection subdue the

strongest sorrow—trust me, your heart will recover peace—

Leon. Yes, when it loses life!

March. Nay, nay—this despondence must not be.

Leon. Ah! Madam! had you ever known how terrible is disappointment in your first passion—

March. (*shuddering*). I—I can comprehend your sufferings—I pity them—indeed—indeed I do!—(*aside*) Yes—'tis nature's mandate, and I must preserve him!—Leon, I have sent for you, to divulge—I mean—to request your advice upon a subject, which for some time past has oppressed me with a sadness heavy as your own.

Leon. Now, indeed, you offer me consolation—ah! teach me how I may alleviate the sorrows of my mother—and for a time I shall forget my own.

March. Thanks!—thanks!—let us be seated.

(*Leon presents the Marchioness with a chair—for a few moments she remains silent in visible emotion, as if collecting her spirits, and then addresses him in a faltering voice*)—You may perceive by

the agitation I strive in vain to repress, that the subject on which I am about to enter is most interesting to my peace—yet mine is but the interest of sympathy—the circumstances relate to another person—

Leon. Another person?

March. Yes, to a friend—a very dear friend—the intimate of my earliest years—the companion of all my joys and sorrows—the confidant of all my hopes and fears:—for such a character, you may readily imagine the interest I feel is of no ordinary class.

Leon. Assuredly.

March. By an uncommon co-incidence of error and misfortune, this person whom I so tenderly regard, is now cast into a situation the most delicate and distressing fortune can produce—her honour—reputation—nay more—the fondest affections of her soul, are all at stake!—by preserving one she fears to sacrifice the other—a crisis rapidly approaches, and her danger appears beyond human prudence to avoid.—To me alone her situation is confided—she implores me to advise her; but the perplexities of the question confound my judgment, and I wish, my son, without betraying the name of my friend, to represent her distresses, and be guided by your opinion in the counsel I shall recommend her to adopt.

Leon. You flatter me by the reference—will you indulge my curiosity with particulars?

March. Ah! her story will excite your indignation—yet I trust your pity more!—Heiress of ancient honours and unbounded wealth, fortune smiled deceitfully upon her birth; and had ambition been the master passion of her breast, no sigh could ever have disturbed its quiet—but soon, alas! a softer tyrant stole unsuspected thither, and marred the destiny he was not called to share!—It was her wretched lot to love, and be denied the object of her passion. Ah! Leon, that look informs me you already pity her—her fate indeed was terrible—a father tore her from the idol of her doating soul—for ever tore her!—then forced her, a trembling sacrifice, into another's arms!

Leon. The husband he selected proved unworthy?

March. No—let my lips do justice to his virtues—honour, nobleness, and tenderest truth made up his soul.—But ah! unhappy one—deaf

to his vows, and blind to all his merits, her cold averted heart disclaimed him still, true to its first fires, and even in their embers cherishing a fatal glow!

Leon. Ill-fated fair!—you told me I should condemn—as yet I only pity her.

March. Oh that her record of misery were finished here, and the page might only then be stained with tears—but black foul characters blot all beyond—my cheek burns! I know not how to explain her fault.—It was at once her blessing and her curse to prove a *mother*—but—but—the *Lord who pressed the infant for his own was not the father of her child!*—Leon! Leon! crazed by affliction, and devoted to despair, in one wild frantic moment she transgressed for that child's sake, all laws human or divine!—She forged detested falsehoods, betrayed the noble heart that trusted in her most, and daringly imposed upon her wedded Lord a suppositious heir—the alien issue of another's bed!

Leon. Monstrous!—shameless, abandoned hypocrite!

March. Hold! Leon!—in mercy do not brand her with terms so terrible! I implore you do not:—'twas for her child's sake she became a wretch—to retain him always near her—to secure for him wealth and rank.—Ah! Leon—'twas for her child—remember—'twas for her child!

Leon. I correct my speech—but tell me, Madam, can this woman sleep of nights?

March. Ah! no, no—wretches from shipwreck newly saved, find sweeter rest on sea-beat rocks than she upon her bed of down.

Leon. Ah! Madam, penitence without atonement—

March. She wishes, prays—but knows not

how or which way to atone.—For many years the imposture has passed unsuspected, and she now beholds her son risen into manhood. But mark, Leon! mark, heaven's never-failing justice in the issue—the evil means by which she laboured to secure her offspring's happiness, those very means, fate has perverted unto his destruction!—A killing sorrow preys upon his youth, and the discovery of his real birth now alone can save him from despair and death.—Imagine, Leon! the agonies of this wretched mother, compelled either to become the murderess of her child or the assassin of her own fair fame!—Alternatives how dreadful!—One gleam of hope yet saves her from distraction—one last lingering gleam:—Dares she reveal the secret to her son, and so dispel the care that kills him, trusting that his prudence will provide against discovery, and aid her still to veil it from the world? This, Leon, is the question I am entreated to decide—your judgment shall determine mine.—Speak, therefore, speak from your soul—dares the mother rely upon her son?

Leon. (rising). With sincerity, Madam; I'll meet your question: if, like me, this unfortunate youth, has been taught to reverence virtue and abhor a fraud; like me, he would start indignant at the odious tale—reject all partnership in vice with scorn, and rend at once the close deception into atoms, even tho' hands he cherished most had framed the web.

March. Oh, misery!—would his stern virtue then sacrifice his mother?

Leon. No—he would bear her in his arms in penury and sickness; shield her in his dutious bosom from reproach and scorn; beg for her at the gates of palaces; starve with her in desolate

hovel; implore, defy, encounter—perish for her sake!—Cheerfully he would resign his *life*—but not his *honour*!—Life is our parents' gift, and all its crimson warmth is theirs at pleasure to reclaim—but Honour is in the diviner soul of man—'tis lent from Heaven—the boon of an immortal, not an earthly stock, and must be bartered for no human good.

March. Recollect the keenness of her sufferings—

Leon. Remember the enormity of her offence—Heavens and earth were I the son of such a mother—

March. (starts from her seat, and catches his hand wildly) You—Leon! You—can you suppose your mother—

Leon. (presses her hand to his lips). No—Eternal blessings on her gracious head! She is the bright reverse of the guilty creature whom I named! (The Marchioness totters back into her chair, and covers her face with both hands.—

Leon proceeds with impetuous warmth).—Of all sweet and awful virtues her spirit is composed entire, and no polluted atom mingles with the work—

March. (in a suffocated voice). Forbear! forbear!

Leon. What! forbid my lip to exercise its dearest privilege?—No—while it stirs with breath and sense, still shall it vibrate to a mother's praise! the radiant pattern of our Spanish dames! her sex's paragon!—Oh! to Providence, eternal thanks! that made me son to such a mother!

March. Oh!—oh! (she sinks back, overwhelmed with emotion).

Leon. Merciful powers!—she sinks—she faints—within there! Floribel!—help! help!

FLORIBEL *rushes in.*

Flor. Ah! Lady! dear unfortunate Lady!—
Oh! Don Leon, you have killed my mistress.

March. (*reviving, glances her eye upon Leon, and shudders*). Floribel! hide me from him! I cannot support his look!

Flor. Don Leon, withdraw a little—the sight of you disorders her. Lady! let me remove you to your chamber—

March. To my grave, Floribel! ah! much rather to my grave! for I am cureless, hopeless—to die and be forgotten, now is all my prayer! (*Floribel supports her to the inner room*).

Leon. What am I to think?—Distraction in her looks—her words of misery, despair and death!—Am *I* the cause?—her wild expressions would declare me so—yet how? in what have I offended?—No, no—I cannot be so cursed—I cannot be an orphan in the hearts of *both* my parents!

Enter MALVOLI.

Mal. Don Leon in the apartments of the Marchioness!—Alone too!

Leon. My mother has this instant quitted me.

Mal. (*uneasily*). Have you been in conversation long?

Leon. Yes, too long for my peace.—Oh, my friend! misfortune seems never weary of pursuing me.

Mal. You concern me inexpressibly—what afflictions can you mean?

Re-enter FLORIBEL.

Flor. Don Leon, my Lady requests of you to quit these apartments for the present—She

will send for you again, when her spirits are more composed.

Leon. I shall expect her summons with impatience.—Oh, Floribel! tell her that she is now the only one in life my heart dares call its own; and if I forfeit her, I lose myself! *[Exit.]*

Flor. Signor, you will follow Don Leon's example, as my mistress desires to be in private.

Mal. My pretty monitress! you must admit me as an exception to her rule—I am charged by his Excellency with the delivery of a message that will not brook delay. (*Floribel returns into the Chamber*).—What may this mysterious interview between the mother and the son portend?—Pray, Heaven! the Marchioness may not have disclosed too much—If she has blabbed to the boy, I must prevent the confession from reaching other ears before the contract's signed. The Marquis already knows sufficient for all useful purposes, and to extend his stock of information might prove dangerous.—She comes!—A timely threat or two, disguised like friendly admonitions, will ensure her silence.

(*The Marchioness enters from her Chamber, followed by Floribel, who crosses the Stage into the Anti-room.*)

March. Malvoli! my friend! my counsellor!—I fly to claim your promised services—now let your generous efforts save me if they can—Destruction besets me upon every side!

Mal. (coolly). Imprudent woman!—what have you revealed to Leon?

March. Not the secret I had intended—he still is ignorant of all.

Mal. (aside). Propitious planet of my birth, I thank thee!

March. Oh, Malvoli! how terrible is the

energy of virtue to a sinner's ear!—this dear unconscious boy has pierced my soul with grief and shame unutterable!—I have discovered that his attachment to Rosaviva never can be subdued.—Pride and affection long have struggled in my breast for victory; but Nature triumphs, and my child shall be preserved—'tis now I call upon your friendship to assist me—now while my penitence is warm, my courage strong, at once conduct me to the fiery trial—lead me to the Marquis!

Mal. To the Marquis!—with what intent?

March. To cast myself upon the earth before his injured presence, and at once proclaim the whole transgressions of my wretched life.

Mal. Are you distracted, Lady? What can prompt you to such preposterous folly?—breathe but a syllable to the Marquis, and your son is ruined. His present destiny is brilliant—while the secret is preserved he still must be received Lerida's heir. Is happiness so solid to be bartered for a love-sick dream?—But at once to banish the idle fancy from both your minds, I am commissioned by the Marquis, Lady, to acquaint you, the hand of Rosaviva is already destined for another.

March. Another! Speak—who is the man?

Mal. Forbid your eyes to lighten, Lady, and let them bend with gentler fires on me!

March. You!—Malvoli—You!—Could I hear rightly?—You!

Mal. Wherefore this admiration, Lady? Is it so incredible that a man neither deformed or superannuate should marry to advantage?

March. A mist, a fatal mist, disperses round me—I have been betrayed—my poor boy too has been sacrificed. Oh! Malvoli—you who pro-

fessed to love and serve us ever—where is your boasted friendship now?

Mal. Firm and sincere as ever. When I am connected with the family, you may have reason to acknowledge it so.

March. My senses unsettle, sure!—Oh, Signor! you know full well the unalterable passion of these young people for each other—you have received many kindnesses beneath this roof—you have professed yourself grateful to its mistress—by the memory then of all your obligations, I conjure you to resign this treacherous and cruel project!

Mal. The commands of my patron must be obeyed.

March. You possess an unbounded influence over him—use it nobly, and the prayers of grateful hearts shall call down blessings on your head from Heaven! Oh, Malvoli! turn not from me! Man of marble heart! behold the woman you have called your benefactress, forgetful of her pride, her rank, her sex—behold her humbly kneeling at your feet for mercy! Look on me, Malvoli, and deny me if you can.

Enter FLORIBEL from the Anti-room, suddenly.

Flor. Heavens! have I lived to see my mistress so disgraced?—Madam!—let me raise you! Signor! shame upon you!—Manhood is degraded when a woman kneels—quick! let the posture be reversed, and at my lady's feet solicit pardon!

Mal. (haughtily). How comes it, Madam! (to the Marchioness) that your woman intrudes uncalled, upon our privacy?

Flor. No welcome errand brought me, Sig-

nor; for it was on your account: there is a stranger inquiring for you.

Mal. I am engaged.

Flor. But he says, his business is urgent, and admits of no delay: 'tis a strange rude being—he forced his way through the domestics in the hall, and has followed me into the corridor.

Mal. Ah! some messenger from the notary's—well, I'll see the fellow, and dispatch his business.

March. Stay, Signor! you shall receive the person here; I will leave you the apartments; but let me speak with you again the instant you are released—do not refuse me, for my soul's eternal peace rests on the issue of our conference.

[*Exit Marchioness.*

(*Floribel returns to the Anti-room.*)

Mal. Insolent pride of birth! at last, the plebeian Malvoli tramples on your pompons lumber, and climbs to greatness, with no elder pedigree than enterprise and wit! the haughty Marchioness crouches at my feet a trembling slave—Leon and Rosaviva are for ever disunited. My credulous patron urges the moment till he calls me son; and in another hour the *Contract* will be signed, that places me for ever beyond the malice of capricious stars!—the topmost pinnacle of my ambition is achieved—wealth, power, and love, conspire to crown me—my fears are over—all my cares dispel—and now—aye now, indeed, my triumph is complete!

(*Floribel returns, followed by a Stranger wildly habited, of an emaciated, yet a fierce and undaunted aspect.*)

Flor. Signor! your visitor is here.

(*Malvoli glances the Stranger's person, and starts back as transfixed with terror.*)

Mal. Ha! earthquakes swallow and conceal me!

Stran. (*fixing his eye with terrible earnestness*). You recollect these features, Signor?

Mal. (*shuddering*). Yes—I think—when last I saw them—

Stran. Aye! 'twas in a wild hour—the thunder rattled, and the lightning flashed! We have known strange vicissitudes since—now, Fortune has re-united us!

Mal. You have traced me then—you have business with me—

Stran. (*significantly*). Public—or—private—which you will—I am equally prepared—to speak aloud—or—whisper low!

Enter FABULETTO.

Fab. His Excellency requires Signor Malvoli's instant attendance in his closet—his notary is with him.

Mal. (*aside, eagerly*). Ha! the Contract—could that but once be signed. (*To the Stranger*) Allow me but a moment's absence, and you shall find me at your pleasure.

Stran. (*crossing him as he attempts to pass*). No! old acquaintance must not separate so suddenly.

Mal. Indeed my business is most pressing—

Stran. So is mine—but I'll dispatch it soon. (*Turns to Floribel and Fabuletto, and raises his voice*). Draw near, good people, and listen while—

Mal. (*catching his arm wildly*). For mercy! let our discourse be private.

Stran. (*bowing sarcastically*). Oh! sweet Signor, at your pleasure—I told you, whether private or public, 'twas indifferent to me.

Fab. What answer to the Marquis?

Mal. Distraction! say that I attend him—as soon as—

Stran. Signor! my time is precious.

Mal. Presently—I beseech you!

Stran. (in a terrible voice). This instant, I command you!

Mal. (with increased trepidation). You shall be obeyed.

(He opens the door leading to the inner Chamber, and tremblingly motions to the Stranger, who stalks with an air of fierce exultation towards him).

Fab. What shall I inform his Excellency?

Mal. That—that—

Stran. (stamping his foot imperatively). Signor!

Mal. (in desperation). I follow you—Lost! lost!—for ever lost!

[The Stranger passes into the Chamber—Malvoli staggers after him—Fabuletto and Floribel exchange gestures, and the door closes upon the Chamber exactly as the Curtain falls.

END OF ACT III.

Act IV.

SCENE—*Same as in Act I.—The Hall with double Staircase, &c.—FABULETTO is discovered watching upon the lower stair—FLORIBEL enters to him from the Side.*

Flor. Hist! hist!—has he left the palace yet?

Fab. (*coming forward on tiptoe*). Hush!—the parties are still closeted together.

Flor. Well—what have you discovered?

Fab. Nothing—though I have applied my ear by turns to every chink and crevice in the wainscot.—At first, indeed, I heard the Stranger's voice loud and blustering; Malvoli's whining and submissive—here and there I could just distinguish a random word, but gradually the voices became lower and lower, 'till at last they refined away into a close busy tantalising whisper, that would have defied the most subtle eaves-dropper in the Grand Inquisitor's pay, to embody with substantial matter.

Flor. This unaccountable visitor—what can he possibly be?

Fab. A devil certainly—for he's a villain's master.

Flor. In truth, he looks like nothing human—his sallow bloodless cheeks—his large eyes that scowl and glare beneath his pent-house brows—and then his voice like thunder—Ah! such a monster! I vow, the very first glance of him frightened me half way into the other world.

Fab. Hark!—I hear a door open now—yes, 'tis Malvoli's—the conference has broken up.

Flor. What are we to hope?

Fab. Rather say, what are we to fear—a calm has succeeded the storm, and when the guilty appear composed, they are always doubly dangerous.—Fly to your chamber, wench, and fetch your veil—in case the stranger quits the palace, be ready at my signal to follow him and watch his steps.

Flor. Well, but if—

Fab. Away this instant!—they come!—away! away!

(They retire separately.—Malvoli descends the Stairs, followed by the Stranger.)

Mal. *(looking inquisitively round).* Recollect! I have your promise.

Stran. Remember rather, that *I have yours*—the performance of one covenant attends the precise fulfilment of the other.

Mal. You may rely upon my punctuality.

Stran. *(smiling coldly).* I think, I may.

Mal. You are to receive forty thousand pistoles when—

Stran. *(quickly).* Fifty!—fifty thousand pistoles, Signor, was the stipulated sum—just half the portion of your noble bride—you cannot so soon have forgotten the terms.

Mal. *(aside).* Harpy!—Vampyre!—true, it was my mistake—the marriage contract only waits for signatures to make me master of the sum; and I pledge myself, before the hour of vespers, fifty thousand pistoles shall be paid into your hands.

Stran. Then, ere the setting-sun resigns Madrid to darkness, I pass its barriers, never to

return!—So stands our covenant—am I not correct?

Mal. To the letter—and every reminiscence of the past—

Stran. (*placing his hand upon his heart*). Lies hidden here till the grave hides all!—Time presses, and I am needed elsewhere.—Mark, good Signor, how the evening wastes—if once I hear the vesper-bell and yet no messenger—ah! then beware, what pillow must at midnight rest your head!

Mal. Enough! I know the penalty—Your hand at parting—Now surely I may claim you as a friend—

Stran. Aye! by the strongest of all possible worldly ties—you have made it my interest to be so.—Farewell, Signor.

Mal. Suffer me to conduct you by the garden-gate: we shall be less liable to observation from the household.

Stran. You are grown strangely diffident; and yet there *was* a time—but e'en use your pleasure. You may appoint the way by which I *quit* this palace, but if ever I *return* to it, I shall choose my own! [*Exeunt.*]

FABULETTO *steals forward.*

Fab. Death and destruction! they part in apparent friendship—some hellish compact has been adjusted, and if the Stranger leaves the palace without my catching any clue to his business or abode—

Enter FLORIBEL, veiled.

Flor. I wait your signal—which way have they taken?

Fab. Ha!—thro' the corridor that opens upon the gardens—Quick! quick! good wench, and follow close.

Flor. Oh! my very soul springs upon tiptoe for the adventure! I'll bring a notable account of my spark, or never let a Spanish chambermaid trust to the offices of her veil again! [*Exit.*]

Fab. Now may the Guardian Saint of Abigails, whatever be her title in the Rubric, and where-soever stand her altar in Christendom, walk luminously before thee, and direct thy steps!—Ha!—the Marquis, Rosaviva, and the Notaries!—Preparations for matrimony and law in the house at the same moment!—nay, then, the case of the family is desperate indeed!

Enter the MARQUIS, leading ROSAVIVA—two Notaries follow, with different Papers, which they arrange upon the Table in centre of the Stage.

Marq. My dearest Rosaviva! dismiss this cloud of sadness from your brow—'tis an unkind reproach to the most generous of men—believe me, sweetest! to a delicate mind that fearfully and finely loves, the most precious gift oppresses rather than delights, if yielded with reluctance.

Ros. (*faintly*). I shall strive to obey you, Sir.

Marq. Where is Malvoli?—Fabuletto! you had my orders long ago to acquaint him that we waited for his presence.

Fab. Oh! my Lord! I delivered your Excellency's commission with the nicest punctuality; but the Signor chanced to be engaged so interestingly with a visitor—indeed a very particular visitor—of whom might I but venture to insinuate half that I suspect, I—(*the Marquis frowns*)—

but here comes the Signor, to answer for himself, my Lord!

Re-enter MALVOLI.

Mal. A thousand apologies, dearest Marquis! for this rude delay; but just as your summons reached me, a friend—a much respected friend—whom I had not seen for many years, and of whose existence I even had long been doubtful, arrived with tidings from my relatives and friends in Portugal.

Marq. The news no doubt is prosperous; at least the unusual animation of your looks induces me to believe it so.

Mal. It has rendered me indeed most happy—the words of my friend have banished from my heart every doubt or fear, that your beneficence had not already cured—(*Malvoli emphasises these words strongly yet obliquely to Fabuletto, who has listened to him with evident solicitude.*)

Fab. (aside). Then the anchor's lost, and Hope must put to sea again!—(*He retires up the Stage to conceal his mortification.*)

Marq. Your explanation satisfies me every way; but there is yet another to whom your excuses more essentially are due—a consenting bride who calls her lover to be blest, yet calls in vain, may surely chide the ingrate for his dull neglect.

Mal. Transporting sounds!—dare I then believe that Rosaviva's choice—

Marq. Is honourable to her reason, and gratifying to her friends.

Mal. Excellent and matchless maid! thus let me breathe my adoration and my gratitude!—I still am lost in admiration of your bounty!—and ah! deign from your own lip to ratify my bliss!

Marq. Speak, my child!—Frankness forms the most bewitching grace of a natural and innocent mind.

Ros. (faltering). Signor—I respect and esteem your character—it is the wish of my dearest benefactor that I should call you Husband—you know the unhappy story of my heart—a hand, a passive hand—is all I have to grant.—If then, so insignificant a boon can merit the acceptance of a mind like yours, 'tis yielded ere 'tis claimed!—when I have become your wife, it will be my duty—and I trust, my—happiness—to—to—(*she bursts into a flood of tears*).

Marq. Rosaviva! this is weakness—your cheek burning with blushes and suffused with tears.

Mal. (eagerly). Ah! my Lord! when I bind a rose to my bosom, I never deem the flower less lovely, because the dews of Heaven sparkle on its leaf!—(*kisses her hand*).—Precious inestimable gift! thus let my lips pronounce my fealty and my love!

Marq. (to the Notary). Are the different papers sufficiently prepared?

Not. All is in readiness, my Lord: the instruments only wait for signatures, to be in full effect.

Marq. First—the Marriage-Contract!—(*He passes to the table, and signs a paper which the Notary presents*).

Fab. (aside, and watching). Poor Don Leon! that's his death-warrant!—Oh! that I could strangle his rival, and choak those rascally lawyers with their own parchments.

Marq. (signing). There is my consent, Malvoli!

Mal. With rapture I subscribe my name! (*taking the pen*).

Fab. If he were to write all his alias's, his hand would ache before it dropt the pen (*aside*):

Marq. Now, Rosaviva! *yours*, to complete the Contract!

Ros. (aside). Why does my heart beat thus wildly?

Fab. Ah!—she hesitates—should she have courage to—

Marq. (takes her hand). My child! we wait for you!

(Rosaviva signs—Fabuletto strikes his forehead in chagrin, and turns away again).

Ros. 'Tis accomplished! I have resigned my destiny into another's power! Permit me to retire—feelings which I cannot suppress—ah! my Lord! pity me—forgive me—but indeed solitude alone can restore my spirits.—*(Aside)* Leon! Leon!—ah! memory, sleep! and never let me muse upon that name again! *[Exit.]*

Marq. (draws Malvoli to the front of the Stage, and gives him the Contract) My friend! this paper gives you immediate possession of my daughter's dowry—the hundred thousand pistoles are already vested at my banker's in your name, and made payable to your order—no words—nay, not a syllable, or you offend me! *(presses his hand, and turns to the Notaries).* I am impatient till all my purposes are completed. Notary, where is the Deed of Gift!

Not. 'Tis prepared according to your Excellency's directions.

Marq. Let me sign at once! *(seizing the pen eagerly).*

Not. My Lord! a moment—for *this* instrument we shall require another witness.

Marq. Ah! a person is luckily at hand—Fabuletto, you shall be our witness.

Fab. (advancing quickly). Oh! certainly, my Lord! I have already been a witness to so many

extraordinary events in your Excellency's household, that 'tis but fitting my name should be on record for the fact. What am I to do? Where am I to sign? What's the meaning of these parchments, Master Notary?

Not. This is a *Deed of Gift*, by which the Marquis conveys to Signor Malvoli the palace he now inhabits, with all its costly furniture, as a present upon his marriage;—and *this* is a solemn instrument, by which his aforesaid Excellency utterly disinherits Don Leon; and secures the reversion of all his estates and fortunes, whatsoever and wheresoever, after his demise, unto the aforesaid Signor and the Lady Rosaviva.

Fab. (*dashing away the pen*). May this right hand be withered, when it assists in the dishonour of my Master!

Marq. Fabuletto!

Fab. Oh! my Lord! passion choaks me!—my words stick in my throat—but—but—as I am a Christian, in the face of man and Heaven, I swear it aloud—Malvoli is a villain, and my Master has been abused!

Mal. Infamous slanderer!—dare but—

Fab. I brave you!—I despise your threats—I defy your power!—Unprincipled and selfish hypocrite! dead to every spark of gratitude or honour! I have been thus long silent, only because I trusted my master's excellent judgment could not long remain infatuated by your arts—but now, this horrible proof of too successful villainy rouses me at once, and had I a thousand throats I would strain them all hoarse, but I would make your treachery known, and hunt down your name to the infamy it merits!

Mal. Marquis! will you suffer me thus to be aspersed—in the presence too of—

Marq. (to the Notaries). My good men, remove these papers into my library—we will follow you, and complete the business there.

[*Exeunt Notaries.*]

Marq. (with severity). Fabuletto! astonishment and indignation have equally restrained my speech, and permitted you thus long to outrage the presence of your superiors with impunity; but as I recover from my surprise, I awaken to a sense of my insulted dignity. Envious, malignant, and incorrigible man! in defiance of repeated warnings, nay of positive commands, you have dared to libel the character of your master's future representative—you presume upon former services; but your present infamy obliterates them all.—This instant cast yourself at the feet of my generous son-in-law, confess your errors, and submissively implore his pardon, or quit my service and this roof for ever!

Fab. What! dismiss me!—my Master whom I have served from infancy, to be driven from his door?

Marq. You have heard my alternative.

Fab. (throwing himself at his feet). No, no—your Lordship cannot mean it—Men of exalted rank, who reverence honour in themselves, will not unnecessarily degrade the beings who cherish their example at an humble distance!—I embrace your knees, and entreat you to recall your sentence!

Marq. Rise!—before you solicit *my* forgiveness, kneel to my son-in-law.

Fab. (with firmness). My Lord! I cannot.—I may endure your Excellency's anger, but I never could support my own contempt.

Marq. Then quit the palace!

Fab. Be it so!—Poverty and Integrity were

the two companions with whom I entered your Excellency's gate, and if I cannot get rid of the first without dismissing the latter, e'en let me pass forth again, with one old acquaintance still clinging about my shoulders, so that I bear away the other still glowing at my heart!

Marq. Begone! Deliver up your accounts to me in the library, and depart at once!

Fab. Oh, my Lord! I am soon prepared—my accounts are easily delivered—every marvedie has its receipt—and when I quit the roof which has sheltered me from infancy, I can lay my hand upon my heart and say with pride, “I have done my duty, and ever regarded my master's interest before my own.” If all persons going out of place could with equal truth make the same declaration, pockets and consciences would prove lighter articles to many of their owners. [Exit.]

Marq. Proud—obdurate—ideot! (*with vexation*).

Mal. Your Excellency has done me justice; but my spirit is not revengeful—this intemperate man has long served you with fidelity, and we must compassionate the infirmity of his nature—then do not dismiss him altogether, but merely banish him for a time to one of your distant estates—only let him be removed from Madrid, and my honour will be thoroughly satisfied.

Marq. This is a generosity worthy of my friend—I adopt your advice.—Fabaletto shall be dispatched this very hour to my castle in Murcia. But first, his insolent spirit must be humbled. Do you write a short recommendation of him to my Murcian steward: he shall receive it from your own hand, and thus become indebted to

the man whom he has injured for the very means of his future establishment—if he has a heart, he will feel such a punishment severely.

Mal. Let it be so—I will prepare the billet for him.

Marq. Rejoin me directly afterwards—I shall not know a moment's ease till the disinheritor of this impostor be complete—that once dispatched, my vengeance soars and gluts upon a nobler prey! [Exit.]

Mal. Fortune! I am thy bounden slave for ever! Every accident conspires to crown my purpose—Fabuletto's banishment to Murcia is incomparable! Thus I effectually remove an officious spy upon my actions, yet prevent him from descanting on my actions to the world!—I am to furnish his credentials for the journey—better and better! the steward is devoted to my interest, and shall be taught a fitting reception for his visitor—(*seats himself at the table and writes*).—"The man who will deliver this is a dangerous knave—I am forced to send him to you to answer a particular purpose—detain him with fair words, but place no confidence whatever in his story. You shall hear from me shortly by another messenger, who will explain my meaning."—Now, my smooth plausible plotting adversary, your troublesome quixotism is notably rewarded!—(*folds up the letter, but starts and rises before he directs it*). 'Sdeath! but I am wasting time on an insignificant, while the hour of Vespers—Ha!—I must not delay longer—the purchase of safety is now in my power—but how to convey it to him?—To leave the palace myself at this juncture is impossible—whom then to entrust?—(*muses a moment*).—Yes—it must be so—Who waits?

Enter a Domestic.

Bid *Vasquez* attend me instantly!—(*Exit Servant*).—He is discreet and silent. I will write an order upon the Marquis's banker for the 50,000 pistoles, and *Vasquez* shall bring me in return the important packet that secures my secret!—(*He seats himself, and begins to write with earnestness—Fabuletto enters behind with reluctant step, as if combating with his passions*).

Fab. I can't—I won't—no—my heart would fly upward to my throat and choak me, if I asked him to forgive—yet—the Marquis has commanded—well—he shall speak first then—(*Fabuletto goes sullenly toward the table where Malvoli writes, and just strikes upon it, to bespeak his presence. Malvoli continues writing with intense earnestness, and speaks without raising his eye from the paper*).

Mal. *Vasquez*! I am going to employ you upon a business of the utmost consequence to my peace and honour—execute your commission with adroitness, and your reward shall be liberal—This order upon the Marquis's banker must be carried to a Stranger who visited me this morning, and who—

Fab. (*aside*). Ah! the Stranger—(*Vasquez enters suddenly upon the opposite side, and comes behind Malvoli's chair*).

Vasq. Signor! I attend your pleasure.—(*Malvoli starts, perceives his mistake, and appears embarrassed*).

Mal. *Vasquez*!—I thought—*Fabuletto*! how came you here?

Fab. (*quickly*). By his Excellency's command, to receive a letter which—

Mal. (*recovering himself*). Aye!—true—to

the Murcian steward—'tis written—you will find I have not been unmindful of your interest, even tho' my enemy. (*Gives the Letter across*).

Fab. Signor—

Mal. No words—you have injured me; but I forgive the offence. Farewell, and may your journey be prosperous. (*He waves his hand impatiently to Fabuletto, who retires slowly, casting inquisitive looks behind him—Malvoli folds up the second Paper*). Now, Vasquez, attend to me—Before this paper is given up to the person whom I address, you must receive from him a sealed packet, which you must guard as dearly as your life, and upon no account whatever—

(*Fabuletto returns abruptly, and places his Letter upon the Table, exactly opposite Malvoli's seat*).

Fab. Signor, you have forgotten to write the direction upon this letter.

Mal. (*angrily*). Tush! 'tis an omission of no consequence—deliver it as it is—I am busy—you intrude—

(*He rises hastily, leaving both Letters ready folded on the Table, and draws Vasquez from to a little distance, where he seems to instruct him in dumb show*).

Fab. (*in violent agitation*). I burn with curiosity! He mentioned an order upon the Marquis's banker to be given to that Stranger—ah! this then is the villain's masterstroke—Ha!—a thought flashes!—the papers are folded in the same shape—both too as yet are undirected—if it were possible—their faces are turned from me—Now or never!

(*The Table is large and circular, supported by one leg in the middle, upon which it turns—The two Papers lie exactly oppo-*

site to each other, and the Inkstand is placed just in the centre.—Fabuletto seizes the moment to turn the Flat upon its Pivot softly, by which movement the Letters change situations, yet the Table preserves precisely the same appearance—Malvoli resumes his seat at the instant the change is effected.)

Mal. (aloud). Now then—you comprehend my instructions thoroughly?

Vasq. Never fear me, Signor.

Mal. (hastily writing on the exchanged Paper). There then is your direction to the person—Away! lose not a moment!—Every thing depends on your dispatch.

Vasq. I am gone at once! [Exit.

Enter PIETRO by another Passage.

Pietro. Signor, his Excellency waits.

Mal. (starts up). I attend this instant. [Exit *Pietro*]. Fabuletto begone—take your letter, undirected as it is—I have no time to waste in trifling. (*Aside*) Now let the vesper bell toll, I shall not tremble when I catch the sound. [Exit.

Fab. (after a pause, takes up the Paper). How shall I act?—I have thwarted the projects of my enemy, but not advanced my own—'Sdeath this letter might prove invaluable, if I knew how or where to employ it. Vasquez alone has the Stranger's direction, and he is already out of reach. The torments of Tantalus were no fable—Here do I stand, like a man in the streets of a dark night with a house key in his hand, but groping about in vain to find the lock that fits it.

Enter FLORIBEL hastily.

Flor. News, Fabuletto! News!—I have traced the wolf to his lurking-place at last—

Fab. (eagerly). Eh! how! what!—traced him, do'st say?—where? Speak—the place?

Flor. Thro' a wilderness of blind alleys, zig-zag lanes, and execrable haunts without a name, after more turnings and windings than a fine lady makes before she tells her inclination, I lodged my formidable charge at last within an obscure hotel in the suburb of Toledo—just five doors below the monastery of St. Augustin—he is called by the people of the house Borrachio.

Fab. Borrachio!—suburb of Toledo—five doors below the monastery—*(striking his hands)*—Enough! Now then for adventure!

Flor. Heavens! what do you mean? Whither are you rushing in this disorder?

Fab. To save our benefactor, woman! or never sleep beneath his roof again—farewell, farewell!

[He rushes out, and Floribel motioning with her arms in encouragement, ascends the Staircase.]

END OF ACT IV.

March. (to Malvoli). Her guilty spirit shrinks before my presence. I stand on her threshold with decisive countenance—
Act V.

SCENE—A spacious Corridor, into which the Palace Chapel opens by three Portals.

Enter the MARCHIONESS, followed by FLORIBEL.

March. How! Floribel, the marriage to be solemnized at midnight? these apartments selected for the purpose? and I commanded to attend the ceremony?

Flor. Madam, the Marquis wills it so.

March. Nature never can support the trial of such an hour—and my Leon too—

Flor. He is also summoned to be a witness of the nuptial.

March. Merciful Powers! to smile upon the sacrifice of all his earthly happiness, and kneel at the altar whilst his own curse is uttering!—O! my boy! my boy! to what despair have I devoted thee!

Enter the MARQUIS, MALVOLIO, and two Domesticities.

Marq. (speaking to Domesticities at the entrance). Hasten your preparations—let all my household assemble before midnight in these apartments—the marriage shall be celebrated in the chapel of the Marchioness—mark me! *of the Marchioness!*

[*Exeunt Domesticities.*]

March. (leaning on Floribel). You hear him! O! Floribel! what hope—what refuge now?

Marq. (to Malvoli). Her guilty spirit shrinks appalled before my presence. I banquet on her terrors! (*Advances with derisive courtesy*).—I trust, Madam, thro' every occurrence in this palace, you still discover new proofs of my respectful deference towards its mistress.

March. (*struggling to affect composure*). Sir, the conduct of my husband has always merited my gratitude.

Marq. But how is this?—methinks your appearance, Madam, but coldly compliments your friends—does the robe of mourning accord with the hour of rapture?—Our habits should sometimes be an image of our feelings; and yours, we cannot doubt, are warm and glowing!

March. Pardon the neglect—my dress shall be altered—

Marq. Nay, not so—the toilette, like the altar, loses its charm when our devotions are compelled.—Yet—a few ornaments might sparkle thro' the gloom—where are your jewels, Lady?

March. They shall be worn—Floribel, fetch my casket hither—it is my pleasure to anticipate your wish. [*Exit Floribel.*]

Marq. Oh! Madam, you were ever an obliging wife—discreet, sincere—and then for faith, the spouse of Brutus sure must yield her boast!

Mal. (*approaching her insinuatingly*). How deeply does the flattering interest you take in my happiness affect my heart!

March. (*in a low stifled voice*). Barbarian!—Fiend!—

Mal. Hush! policy at least might teach you softer terms.

(Floribel returns with the Casket.)

March. Floribel, open the casket—my hand trembles so, I cannot.

Marq. Oh! be not nice in the selection—a few may serve—for instance, those bracelets I presented to you on your wedding-day—the occasion now is similar.

(The Marchioness sinks into a chair, and taking forth the Bracelets, fastens them upon her arm mechanically without attention, while Floribel hangs a chain of brilliants over her neck).

March. I am adorned, my Lord, as you desire.

Marq. (to Malvoli). Her embarrassment is so great, she does not yet discover that I have exchanged the portraits upon her bracelet—I pant for the moment.—Leave us, my friend, together—I meditate an exquisite revenge.

Mal. I know your wrongs, and dare not plead against the voice of justice—yet remember—mercy!—(Aside) E'en let the tempest burst at once—however wide the lightning scatters, I can at least defy the flash! [Exit.

March. (to Floribel). Do not leave me—something in his manner makes me shudder.

Marq. Madam, do me the favour to dismiss your woman: I wish a few words to meet your ear in private.

March. (much agitated). Floribel, retire!

Flor. Lady!

March. Yes, yes, it must be so—pity me, pray for me!

(Floribel presses her Lady's hand in silence, and retires reluctantly).

Marq. (after a pause). You appear disturbed, Madam. I trust the singularity of our situation does not alarm you—'tis true, indeed, our domestic interviews have been of late, like gleams of wintry sunshine, scarce and brief, with chilling clouds between.

March. I both confess and lament the rarity of moments, which our hearts and our reasons ought equally to prize. Permit me to observe, my Lord, such moments were not always strangers to us.

Marq. Umph!—you would reproach me then with neglect?

March. No—I may regret, but never shall reproach. Yet, my Lord, I cannot but feel—severely feel—the once beloved Victoria is forgotten in the Marchioness Lerida. I am still the partner of your honors, but I possess your heart no longer. (*Weeps*).

Marq. (*aside*) Tears! flow bitter drops—ye fall on stains the vast ocean would but wash in vain!—Madam! you do me wrong—my tender regard for you and yours is great as ever. I am even now industriously employed upon the welfare of an object precious to your love.

March. Precious, my Lord!

Marq. Aye, Madam! most precious! (*Aside and labouring to disguise his rage*)—Now vengeance smile!—I have been meditating how to reward the virtues of my wife, by an attention to the interests of her offspring.

March. Of our Leon?

Marq. Of—your son—Madam! he now has reached that period of life, when a decided character should be stamped upon the destiny of youth, and some honourable course of action opened to the view.

March. (uneasily). Pardon me, my Lord, but I should conceive, Don Leon of Lerida, an only son, and born to represent two of our first Castilian families, could not receive any establishment more brilliant than the sanction of his parental roof.

Marq. Oh! Madam, mothers frequently mistake the interests of their children—with them affection hoodwinks judgment. I know your fondness, but cannot suffer it to impede a future Grandee of Spain upon his proud career of fame and glory. Honourable enterprise invites the youth—the Court appoints him to a distinguished command in our distant Indies! his ready vessel waits to catch the breeze, and ere another week be counted, the swift Atlantic bears your darling, far from inglorious home-bred sloth, to scenes of action and a soldier's daring joys!

March. Heavens! my Lord—you cannot mean it—separate me from my child!—I never can support his loss!

Marq. You once were separated from your husband, yet that calamity you bore with patience.

March. (confused). Is it probable his absence will be long?

Marq. I'll not deceive you, Lady—whilst I exist, he never will return.

March. Never!—Never!

Marq. I have spoken. But what is the sacrifice of tenderness to the triumph of ambition? Continents may divide, and oceans roll between, still the mother will know her son is prosperous and powerful. A tropical sun may scorch the fairness of his brow, yet the coronet of nobility must sparkle round it! and when a wretched husband's death, restores the stripling to his na-

tive land; obsequious crowds shall hail him as he springs to shore.—‘*Illustrious Signor!*’—‘*Marquis of Lerida!*’

March. O! merciless decree! inhuman and unjust!

Marq. Hold! Madam; dare not breathe one syllable to brand my conduct with inhumanity or with injustice—dare not, Madam; *dare not!*

March. My Lord!—you terrify me—how has my Leon merited this hate?—what has he done?

Marq. What has he done?—Infamous, unblushing woman!—what has he—Oh! curses—an injured husband’s curses strike the minion’s head!

March. Oh! God!—he has been defamed—belied—Speak! who is his accuser?

Marq. (with ungovernable fury). *His father!!*

March. His father!!

Marq. Aye! Leon’s father—Victoria’s paramour—and Lerida’s curse!—Tremble, Adulteress! the grave hath found a voice, and its accusing words are registered in blood! (The Marquis suddenly snatches forth the secreted Letter from his bosom, and holds it before the Marchioness—she recognizes—shrieks violently, and attempts to fly, but is forcibly withheld.—Nay, nay, you do not fly!—Look you! how trim this crimson infamy befits a husband’s hand!

March. Away! away! I’ll not endure this shame!

Marq. Come!—come—you must—you shall—Read! and if your eyes would weep, let them rain suddenly, for here’s a fixt and fiery sin shall strike them else with blindness! (the Marchioness shuddering, draws her disengaged hand before her eyes, to prevent their sight).

Marq. Nay, listen then! (still grasping her by one hand, he reads with a violent denouncing tone)

—“Rash and inconsiderate lover! the chastisement of our forbidden passion already has overtaken us!”—(*Without releasing herself, the Marchioness sinks upon one knee, in the action of prayer*).

March. Eternal justice! thou permittest not the most hidden crime to pass unpunished!

Marq. “This day I have given birth to a son, whose existence drowns me in tears, and condemns me to despair!”

March. (*still in prayer*). O! accept these dreadful agonies in expiation of my guilt!

Marq. Now—proclaim me to the world inhuman and unjust!—Now—detected and exposed, covered with a thousand crimes, ten thousand shames—

March. Mercy! Mercy! not for myself, but for the innocent—ah! for *Leon*—mercy!

Marq. And while you plead for this wretched boy, do you not wear upon your arm a portrait which—

March. My Lord, my Lord! I know myself unworthy, and will restore it. (*Exerting herself to unclasp the Bracelet, she discovers the likeness of her Lover—her eyes become fixed intensely, and all her faculties appear benumbed with horror*).—Whose deed is this? Will the graves burst, and let their dead return to us? Some fiend torments my soul—away!—’twill drive me mad!

Marq. (*alarmed by her agonies*). Hold! you are deceived—that portrait—

March. (*dashing it from her*). Begone, terrific shade!—No, no—it floats before me still—it calls—it summons me—forgiveness—ah! forgiveness in the grave!—(*She sinks exhausted and insensible at the Marquis’s feet*).

Marq. Victoria! look up—I charge you—

God! she hears me not—her senses flown—
convulsed and expiring at my feet—ah! vengeance
too severe! Help! help! this instant help!—
(*Floribel rushes in*). Swift! swift! assist the
Marchioness! a sudden faintness overcomes her
—swift, and help to raise her!

Flor. Ah! her agonies are dreadful! I fear me
she is dying!

Marq. Peace, woman, peace! nor breathe a
thought so horrid. Heaven sees my heart.—I
would be just, but not unmerciful!

Leon. (*without*). I heard a voice exclaim for
help! Now—proclaim me to the world!

Enter LEON.

Ah! my mother! insensible and cold! parent!
universe! only one! your Leon calls you back to
life.—(*He removes the Marchioness from Flori-
bel's arms, and supports her on his own breast*).

Marq. The mother and the son!—both, both
my victims! oh! torture! the triumph I have
coveted so long, distracts me now it is achieved!

(*He turns away, and casts himself into a
seat*).

Leon. Speak to me, mother! bless me with
a word!

Flor. The life returns—see! her eyes unclose
—Lady! honored Mistress!

March. (*gazing slowly and confusedly round*).
Where have I been? my soul has wandered surely
in some frightful dream.

Leon. Be calm! you are with those who love
and reverence you.

March. (*with quick apprehension*). Leon! that
look—that voice—ah! I remember all—and now,
indeed, I know myself a wretch!

Leon. (*straining her to his heart*). Here rest
your sorrows and forget their source.

March. No, no—that virtuous breast denies its

sympathy to vice. Leon! recollect the story which you heard this morning! Ah Leon! Leon! that story was *our own*—that guilty mother, and that wretched son—now break for ever from each other's arms! (*she violently starts from his embrace, and falls back into Floribel's arms*).

Leon. Amazement!—horror!—the Marquis not my father! Do not distract me—speak, mother! speak to me in mercy!

Flor. Alas! her words are choked with anguish—mourn your misfortune, but compassionate its cause!

Leon. Enough! my brilliant dream of pride is ended—I wake, and find myself a wretched nameless being—the offspring of dishonour (and reproach).

Flor. No, not of dishonour—for laurels bloom upon your father's grave, and virtue sanctified your mother's love. Before my Mistress ever saw the Marquis, her eyes in secret wept a husband's death!

Marq. (*starting suddenly from his seat*). Ha! what words were those?—rash woman! dare not to abuse my ear with hopes that—Victoria! speak—my soul cries out for certainty—speak—oh! say, that Leon's birth was not polluted by his mother's guilt!

March. Heaven mark my words, and judge me by their truth! Lerida!—No—I have abused your confidence, but never have betrayed your honour to disgrace! Deign, much-injured man! ah! deign before we part for ever, to hear the wretched story of a heart, which learns too late the value of a love its crimes have lost.

Marq. Speak, Madam!—let my extent of injury be known.

March. (*supporting herself between Floribel and Leon*). The days of childhood were all in life

that I can count as happy ones, for even at sixteen my woes commenced their dark career. In my father's palace was bred an orphan-youth, whose only heritage was Nature's graces and a virtuous mind: a mutual tenderness talked early from our eyes, and so possessed our hearts: Fortune had cast our lots unequally; but Love despises earthly differences, and a rash vow in secret uttered, soon made love our fate. Brief was the dream of bliss—war tore my husband from me, to join the Christian army at the siege of Tunis. Ah! memory! dreadful moment! still I feel the blow. By Moorish swords my hapless Lord was slain—whilst I, remote from every succour, every hope, endured the ruthless fury of a father's rage, and gave existence to a wretched child, amidst the curses of the being from whom my own was drawn!

Leon. Ah! in pity—that child was—

March. I press him to me now!—Alas! Lerida, these eyes were freshly flowing with a widow's tears, when yours first sparkled with a lover's hope. In vain I strove to shun a destiny so fatal to us both. My furious father tore my infant from my arms, and swore its innocent life was forfeit to his vengeance, unless I promised to conceal the former nuptial, and accept your vows. Nature stifled justice in my bosom. I deceived your honourable love with feigned returns, and whilst a living bridegroom clasped my hand, deep in a dead lord's grave my heart lay buried!

Marq. Cruel! Were then aversion and disdain the only dower a tenderness like mine could claim?

March. Yet for a little spare your reproaches, generous man! With princely powers you soon embarked for Mexico, and left your new-made wife conscious it was her fate a second time to

prove a mother.—Scarce had your departure freed me from control, when, regardless of my situation, fame, nay life—with all a parent's longing speed, I flew to clasp in secret my poor forbidden Leon—the banished offspring of my virgin love!—Amidst the Pyrenees, thro' the storms of winter, over crumpling rocks and swollen floods, I sought my treasure—the distance and the dangers of the journey overcame my strength—nature's pangs surprised me prematurely, and even in the very hut which screened my forlorn-one, my orphan babe—Lerida's noble heir was born.

Marq. God! was I then indeed a father—and that infant—

March. Just looked upon this world, then closed its eyes, and shut it out for ever—I saw it perish!—Just *then*—my senses half unsettled, in misery, in despair—Floribel placed Leon on my bosom—he smiled, and stretched forth his little hands towards me—frantically I snatched him to my heart—“My only-one! never will we separate again!” I cried—an instantaneous impulse tempted and subdued my soul—but mine was no premeditated sin—no—it was a fraud too rash for judgment, too precipitate for calculation—the death of my *second* child was held concealed.—Far from native Spain, and far from all who knew my person, for several successive years I roved in ceaseless travel, till the trifling difference in Leon's age had ceased to be apparent—then boldly I presented him within this palace as its rightful heir—Ah! do not look upon me, Lerida! your glances kill me—my perfidy deserves your hate—but ah! my heart must break before it learns to bear it. (*Sinks upon Floribel's bosom*).

Leon. Mother! dear unhappy mother!—well, well—recollect the pledge I gave you—I never will forget it—“this duteous breast shall shield you from reproach or scorn!”—(*Passing to Lerida*). My Lord, the poor impostor you have reared in greatness, acknowledges your fostering bounty with a glowing tho’ a breaking heart; and utters blessings, as he quits your presence and your roof for ever!

Marq. (with dignity). Young man, remain! you shall never leave me.—Victoria, why am I forced at last to teach the knowledge of a heart, a wife’s injustice has for twenty years refused to learn?—One hour, one minute e’en, of tender confidence, had saved the anguish and reproach of both our lives.—But I have been regarded as a tyrant, fierce, inexorable, merciless, dead to the charities of nature, and panting for the immolation of my kind!—Well, well—judge whether I have merited this strange distrust.—I have suffered injuries long and deep—the power of vengeance at last is amply mine, and I employ it only—to forgive!

March. Ah! dare I yet hope—

Marq. Victoria! think thou wert falling from some dizzy rock, about to perish on the instant dreadfully, when to the perilous point thy husband rushes with redeeming arms, and bears thee safely to a sheltering home!

(*The Marchioness attempts to throw herself at the feet of the Marquis, but he prevents her with emotion, and folds her in his arms*).

Enter ROSAVIVA.

Ros. What do I see?—Tears and caresses mingled!

Leon. (*rapturously*). My Rosaviva! ah! yes mine—transporting accent—mine again! Oh! there are wonders—no longer I approach you as a brother, but as the fondest, truest—

Marq. Hold! Leon—our knowledge comes too late—recollect—*Malvoli!*

Leon. Ah! my Lord, dash me not at once from rapture to despair—Rosaviva not my sister, and yet another's bride!

Marq. My word once passed, cannot with honour be recalled—*Malvoli* too, so excellent a friend—

March. Friend!—Detested hypocrite! to you and yours the direst foe!

Marq. Victoria! by our fresh-recovered loves, I charge you to forbear—on my soul you wrong him:—*Malvoli's* bosom is the residence of every generous virtue.

March. Hear me, my Lord! even by the dear name of Husband, yet scarce permitted to my lip, I now conjure you hear and trust me—this gilded serpent has crept into our bosoms but to sting us mortally—those papers which revealed a proof of my offence—

Marq. Were *not* betrayed by him—by accident I discovered them in your casket—by Heavens! he knew not of their existence—

Flor. Alas! my Lord, too well he knew—too artfully he practised on a guileless nature—*Malvoli's* own pernicious hand first placed those papers in the casket, and himself devised the spring by which they were discovered.

Marq. How!

March. It is most true—long since, the specious traitor was acquainted with my story; and oft when conscience would have hurried me to make confession at your feet, by wiles and threats, he

still restrained the virtuous impulse, and forced my nature upon new deceits.

Marq. Amazement! what may I believe?—the lips we love persuade us like a charm—and yet to doubt Malvoli—

Leon. He is here!

Enter MALVOLI.

Marq. (eagerly). Oh, Malvoli! you are timely come—here are accusations staked against your honour, strange and terrible.

Mal. My good Lord—accusations!

Marq. Aye! such as are mortal to the ear of friendship. Speak! is it possible, that *you* could know this suffering youth was innocently born?—that *you* constrained Victoria's lip to silence?—that when my brain was all on fire, dæmon-like, *you* still beheld my pangs unmoved—breathed on the destroying flame, and bade me perish when your word could save?

March. Barbarian, speak! Was not thine the treacherous hand that placed my papers in the casket, and then betrayed them to the Marquis?

Marq. Answer, Malvoli! for these doubts distract me.

(Malvoli appears to collect himself gradually during this address, and then replies with a steady composure of tone and manner).

Mal. My Lord, far more acutely do these doubts afflict your friend. Permit me to remark, such vague surmises and such coarse interrogations, but ill befit your Excellency's character. Hereafter, an explanation shall be made to satisfy you all; but time is now too precious—the hour

of rapture has arrived, and thus (*seizing Rosa-viva's hand*), with all a lover's tender haste, I claim my bride!

Marq. (intervening). Hold, Signor!—this hand is pure—so pure must his be proved, to which I yield it. Answer instantly—are these charges real?

Mal. Appearances mislead us often—whatever I have done, I well can justify.

Marq. (indignantly). Was I not heard?

Mal. You press me to a point!—well then, set your doubts at rest—I *have* deceived you!

Marq. Monstrous, unexampled villany! He avows, nay triumphs in the crime. And this man I have trusted—Oh! my soul sickens at its own remembrances!—I scorn to tell thee what thou art. Go, cruel man! thy conscience be thy punishment—avoid my sight for ever!

Mal. Marquis of Lerida! pause ere you decide—as yet I am your friend. Once more, I here demand my bride—beware how you deny my claim.

Marq. God!—a threat!—from thee! Begone, begone—quit my palace!

Mal. (discarding at once the semblance of moderation, and bursting forth into ferocious defiance). Insolent mendicants! Creatures of my will! whom at a breath my power can make as nothing—Quit your palace! Ha! ha!—'tis mine!—mine, fast as the law can bind—this stately edifice—your vast estates—your powers—your office, nay, your very name—all, all are mine! Recollect your signatures that scarce are dry—you gave them freely, and I thank the liberal hand that did so.

Marq. (as paralysed by the recollection). God! my mad credulity has merited this scourge.

March. Husband! Alfonso!—Can this wretched O! say—what then are lost?

Marq. All, all—but thee and honour—
(*Throws himself upon her neck.*)

Leon. The traitor shall not bear it thus—my life be taken rather—Draw, villain!

Mal. (*smiling superciliously*). Young man! sheath your sword again. The stake is too unequal—opulence and beggary make fearful odds.

Leon. Unmanner'd dastard! Nay then by Heavens—

Mal. Ha! am I beset with bravoës? (*A noise without*). You will not find me unprovided. Ho! within there!—swift—who waits?

FABULETTO rushes in almost breath'less.

Fab. A villain's foe! (*Malvoli recoils*). Nay, good Signor, never start—did I proclaim myself your enemy?

Marq. Thou too here! my faithful, injured monitor—I cannot now be humbled lower.

Fab. Oh! my Lord, my loved, my honoured Lord, do not talk thus—I throw myself at your feet again—only say that you forgive—say that you restore me to your favour.

Marq. (*raising him*). Ah! to my heart for ever.

Fab. (*enthusiastically*). Then you believe me true—Ha! ha! ha! bless you!—bless you!—I cannot—my head swims—Oh! bless you!—bless you!

Mal. Fellow! reserve your transports for some other roof—here they offend.

Fab. (*with sudden self-command*). Excellent Signor! you shall be obeyed.—Mark! how your

word can tame my spirit.—I would but execute a last commission here, and trust me, never after will intrude uncalled. I am charged with the delivery of a *pacquet*, containing, as I am told, much interesting private correspondence—'tis destined for some inmate of this palace, but the person's name is utterly unknown to me, and I solicit information, how I best may execute the trust.

Mal. (uneasily). Where is this *pacquet*?

Fab. (drily). Safe in my custody.—(*Draws a pacquet from his bosom*)—'tis thus superscribed—“Letters, of various dates, received by Borrachio at Lisbon, from his friend Ruffaldi at St. Ubes—to be delivered to Ruffaldi, now a resident in the Palace of Lerida.”

Mal. (snatching at the pacquet). Give it me, —'tis mine!

Fab. (evading his attempt). How, Signor!—You talk in riddles—this *pacquet* is directed to *Ruffaldi*—and your name is *Malvoli*—were you ever known by any other?

Mal. No matter—it is mine—yield it villain, or your life shall answer! (*rushes furiously upon him*).

Fab. (retreating towards the chapel-doors, and holding the pacquet at arm's length).—Nay, less violence shall serve—I only wish to ascertain the real owner.—Declare before my Lord, these letters to be your property, and I resign them instantly.

Mal. (violently agitated). By every sacred oath, I here protest aloud—those letters are my own!

Fab. You have sworn well, Signor!—We'll have more witnesses!—(*He strikes his hands together—the Chapel-doors fly open—the interior scene*

is illuminated for Service, and crowded by the household—two Officers of Justice dart forward at the instant, and Borrachio, in the custody of others, appears in the centre of the groupe).

Fab. The confession is recorded!—Behold your prisoner!—(He points to Malvoli—who stands confounded—the Officers secure him).

Mal. Good Men!—some gross mistake, (*Borrachio advances*).—Ha! Borrachio! I charge you be discreet—my messenger has sure miscarried.

Bor. (smiling bitterly). Old acquaintance! Fortune has played the jilt with both of us. But be of cheer—our fates are still indissoluble—a galley-chain will bind us to each other for the rest of life.

Marq. What miracle now works to save us? Who is this stranger?

Bor. A blunt, plain-speaking man—by the world's modish tongue termed robber—in his own vocabulary, yclept “Philosopher.”—One who has wit and courage enough to make rich rogues deal justly with their poorer brethren—but say the worst of me, I was once—that man's friend!

Mal. (all trepidation). I still am yours—in truth—by my soul, I am.

Bor. Umph!—may be so—but friend or foe, now matters not—your craft and my valour meet the same reward: an honest fool hath out-generalled both knave and hero.

Fab. Yes, by my faith, my Lord—though a fool, I so handled a rapier, while the alguazil so flourished a wand, that—

Bor. Conqueror! by your leave—I chuse to be my own historian. Mighty Marquis, hear me! Yon man of many names, and I Borrachio, are of one country's birth—both younger bro-

thers: Nature endowed us with liberal appetites, but Fortune and our fathers stinted their enjoyment. We formed a league to counteract our spiteful stars, and with the superfluity of others, cure our own defects—his was the tongue to wheedle—mine the arm to strike—he lured the panther to the toils;—I smote the prey, and stripped it of its hide!

Marq. Monsters of guilt!

Bor. Less comment, or you mar a history—All Portugal soon noised with our exploits—Our fame raised enemies, and to shun the prying Fathers of the Inquisition, we sailed in haste for the New World—A storm arose, and wrecked our vessel on your Spanish coasts: through the wild surge I bore my drowning comrade in these arms to land—*my* courage too, brought safely to the shore our common stock of property—you'll say our plunder—no matter for a word: Just then—the storm still raging fearfully—a forked lightning struck me to the ground! Now, mark me, Lord! and thou shalt hear how grateful is the human heart—That man—whose very life had freshly been my gift—as I lay prostrate, nerveless, on the lone sea-beach—that caitiff-slave—O! hear it, Marquis!—he plunged his dagger in my side, and rifled thence my just division of our hard-earned spoils! he fled, and left me, in his thought, a meal for vultures—but God is just—I live to tell the villain—my revenge now blasts him!

Mal. (*aside*). A palsy light upon my failing arm!

Bor. The charity of passing strangers saved my life. Two years I roved and prayed for vengeance; yet roved and prayed in vain; at last, the gloomy bride was yielded to my vow—

this morn, I traced, I found—I overwhelmed my foe! His body I disdained to smite—no, his wealth I struck at—for gold is properly the blood of avarice—that first course crossed, revenge treads other paths, and still achieves the goal! Marquis, rejoice!—your tyrant is your slave—his fall must needs involve my own; still mine be the arm to cast him at your feet. Our crimes stand there indelibly avouched—(*pointing to the packet*).—Pronounce our common doom!—one dungeon, one torture, nay, if thou wilt, one scaffold!—or life or death, my prayer speeds evenly—all boons are granted—in *révenge*.

Mal. (terrified to a last resource). My ever noble, tho' my injured Lord! I fall in penitence before your feet, and sue for mercy—not my small merit, but your exceeding charity, now speak—once you esteemed me well—ah! my kind Lord—

Bor. Why, what a half-soul'd cur art thou! to fawn upon thy hate, and lick the hand thou would'st have bitten!

Marq. Convey them hence—to the just laws I leave their punishment.

Mal. (goaded to desperation). Is there then no hope?

Bor. None! for *I* am at thy side, to cry—despair!

Mal. (frantically). Leave me!

Bor. (firmly). Never!

Mal. Distraction!—Torture!

Bor. Triumph!—Extasy!—(*The Officers remove them from the Apartment*).

Marq. Retributive Heaven! by their own perfidies the traitors fall.—Fabuletto!—Preserver, friend—teach me, how best I may declare my gratitude?

Fab. My Lord!—by never mentioning the word again.

Marq. Excellent man! our home, our hearts, be ever yours.—Victoria! this way our parental cares and claims become inseparable—(*he places Rosaviva's hand in Leon's*)—and thus we achieve the dearest period of human wishes—a family united within itself—whose happiness is founded upon mutual confidence, and cemented by reciprocal esteem. [*Exeunt Omnes.*]

THE END.

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